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ABSTRACT

This book is designed to help school administrators locate, analyze, and effectively use relevant information to create policies at the school or district level. Chapter 1 introduces the concepts of school policy and policy analysis, outlines the five-step Clear and Simple Analysis (CASA) model, and lists seven principles of effective policy analysis. Chapter 2 shows how to locate policy-relevant information in an efficient and effective way. Chapters 3-7 describe the stages of the CASA model: defining the policy problem; defining policy decision criteria; developing policy alternatives; considering policy alternatives; and presenting policy choices to the decision makers. Four tables and 10 figures are included. (LMI)

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Guide to Choices, Politics, and Community Relations

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SHAPING SCHOOL POLICY

Guide to Choices, Politics, and Community Relations

Karen S. Gallagher

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Foreword

In the schools of the twenty-first century, the sphere of those engaged in policy development for public schools will increase. Once only the superintendent and his or her immediate staff had to be concerned with the development of policies. With the installation and expansion of site-based management, school building administrators will have to be as concerned with policy development as the central staff.

Karen S. Gallagher approaches her topic as a former teacher and school site administrator. Her view takes in multiple perspectives, however, because she has served in a central office capacity as well as in a key executive role in performing policy studies in Ohio. She has taught the politics of education at the graduate level at the University of Cincinnati in addition to serving on curriculum audit teams in several states for the American Association of School Administrators.

Ultimately, policy analysis leads to making choices and engaging in decision making. School administrators who take the time to pursue Professor Gallagher's thoughts on policy development and implementation will find the quality of their decisions improved. For one thing, they will spend a lot more time on problem identification than before. For another, different kinds of analytical techniques will be available. And, when more

solutions are generated through an expanded data base, the probability of making better decisions is vastly enhanced.

That is what policy analysis is all about, whether at the local, state, or national levels. This book truly is a "guide" to improved choices in education.

FENWICK W. ENGLISH
University of Kentucky

Preface

Much has been written about what is wrong with public education in the United States. Although the causes of the problems and even the problems themselves are not universally agreed upon, the solutions offered and enacted by federal and state policymakers show remarkable consistency. Although many school administrators believe that state legislatures, governors, and state departments of education control public schools and have narrowed the range of options for solving classroom and school problems, the evidence shows the contrary. What happens in the classroom and in the school is most often the result of locally determined practices. Few books offer practicing administrators knowledge of *how* to go about making informed policy choices. Few graduate courses provide hands-on experience in separating political rhetoric from reasonable analysis of policy options. The purpose of this book is to assist school administrators in quickly locating information, systematically analyzing the information, and effectively using the information to organize and resolve policy issues at the local school or district level.

This book has grown out of the varied experiences I have had in public education. In each role I have played in public education—teacher, administrator, researcher, consultant, and parent—I have experienced frustration over the process of solving local

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dilemmas even though I realize all schools share similar problems. The question is this: How can we choose the most effective program for our school or district in a systematic way to include both the specifics of the local setting and the lessons learned from others?

The lessons we have learned from research are many. First, solutions mandated from the national or state levels rarely improve the teaching-learning process in the classroom. Second, there *are* effective public schools and public school teachers. Third, solutions developed at the local level by those who must implement them often result in increased achievement for students. This book is organized to bring together the lessons learned from research and evaluation with applied basic methods of policy analysis at the local level.

In this book, the reader will discover where to go and what to look for in searching for information on school-related policy issues. In Chapter 2, key traditional resources including many little-known information sources are identified and described. For each source, specific information on its use is given. Sometimes this will be an address and telephone number. In other cases, specific references that can be found in libraries or electronic data bases are provided.

Effective school policies, however, come from sources other than the traditional literature base and electronic information services. This book encourages you to learn from the experts. Most educators assume that experts will not talk to the public. This simply is not the case. This book will give you suggestions on how to find the experts and how to get them to share their knowledge freely. This book does not, however, suggest that you should not bring in well-recognized experts to work with your administrative team or your teaching staff. Rather, you will find that, after you have completed the policy analysis cycle and the policy choice has been made, you can bring in the appropriate experts to help you and the staff implement your reasoned choice.

Finally, this book will help you learn how to conduct a clear and simple analysis of pressing educational problems, using action-oriented information search techniques and a five-step policy analysis model. The successful retrieval of information is

not the goal of this book. Indeed, the point of being informed is to help solve problems. More specifically, each step of the policy analysis process requires information: information relevant to identifying the real problem thoroughly, information helpful to developing policy alternatives, or information useful in implementing the policy choice.

Throughout the chapters of this book, I have consistently used the terms *policymakers, clients,* and *policy analyst* in place of specific administrative roles in schools. But my working assumption is that policymakers are local boards of education acting in their official capacity. In the policy analysis process, *policymaker* and *client* are synonymous terms. I also have assumed the role of policy analyst will be played by an educational administrator. Although the singular term *policy analyst* is used, in practice, an individual administrator or a select committee may be given the responsibility for analyzing and resolving a problem. Whatever is the case for the reader, *clear and simple analysis* (CASA) assumes that a level of trust exists between the policymakers and the policy analyst. The purpose of engaging in the policy analysis process at the local level is to find workable solutions to problems so more students will benefit and no student will suffer.

I intend this book for local school administrators and teachers who are actively involved in such reforms as site-based management and school-based decision making. Community activists and parent groups will find much to help them participate in reasoned school policymaking. At the district level, those who are involved in revising curriculum, designing programs for the at-risk student, preparing and presenting staff development programs, or creating community support for providing increased financial resources will find this book a helpful guide.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many individuals, all of whom suffered through several drafts and many late-night discussions. In the

role of series editor, Fenwick English persuaded me to write about policy analysis at the local level and offered insightful advice on earlier drafts. His encouragement kept me on task and his belief in the value of the book never faltered despite my prolonged writing schedule. Students in my class on education policy analysis were valuable sources, especially Charlsie Hina, whose experiences as a principal in the newly restructured schools of Kentucky inspired many examples. I could not have undertaken this project without the support of my family. Pat and Sean lived with this book as much as I did. In fact, my concern for Sean's educational well-being motivated me to write about policy analysis for school principals. I want to acknowledge the able skills of Mrs. Helen Wald, who graciously transcribed several chapters on short notice. Finally, I would like to thank Gracia Alkema and Ann McMartin for their patience and assistance through the process of getting this book "to press."

This book is dedicated to the men and women in educational administration who work hard to make schools better places for human beings—students, teachers, and parents. I hope this book will make some small contribution to their efforts.

KAREN S. GALLAGHER
University of Cincinnati

About the Author

Karen S. Gallagher is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Cincinnati. She is also Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration. In addition to her experience in higher education, she has been a teacher and a school and district administrator in five states. She received her B.A. in political science from Western Washington University, her M.A. from the University of Washington, and her Ph.D. from Purdue University. She served as Policy Consultant and Director of the Ohio Commission on Education Improvement in Columbus, Ohio, from 1989 to 1991. Her professional interests include the politics of education reform and educational policy analysis at the state and local levels.

NOTES

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What Is School Policy?

Anyone who reads a newspaper or watches the news on television knows public schools have problems. Anyone who spends time in contemporary American public schools knows policies are adopted by school boards; programs are implemented by principals and teachers; and student achievement is measured by standardized tests, to solve the problems identified by national, state, and local policymakers, and is reported in the media. Since the early 1980s, much attention has been focused on changes in federal and state education policymaking. As the school reform movement enters its second decade, researchers, evaluators, and education policymakers have shifted their attention to the school and individual classroom. As principals, teachers, and parents have always known, what happens in the

school and between the teacher and student makes the difference between effective policies and passing fads. A central premise of this book is that local district and local school policies, whether implemented by mandates or through innovation, can and do make the difference between students who succeed and students who fail.

This chapter introduces the concepts of school policy and policy analysis. The first two sections provide brief introductions to school policy and policy analysis. The third section outlines the five-step CASA model. The fourth section provides the rationale for this book and its focus on local school policy analysis. The fifth section lists seven principles of effective policy analysis. The last section presents the organization of the book.

1.1 School Policy Defined

Before discussing in detail a clear and simple model of policy analysis, a common understanding of *policy* in general and *school policy* specifically is necessary. Many books and articles have been written that attempt to determine a common definition. For instance, Dunn (1981, p. 61) defines *policy* as "a long series of more or less related choices, including decisions not to act, made by governing bodies and officials." In their book for the novice public policy analyst, Patton and Sawicki (1986, p. 38) describe policy as "a course of action to be followed by a government body or institution." They note that the term *policy* is often used synonymously with *plan* and *program*. In his 1984 "state-of-the-art" analysis of education policy, Mitchell explains how the concept of policy is both complicated and subtle. He cites definitions that range from broad and simple statements such as "what governments do and say" to complex lists of characteristics requiring several pages to explain. Guba (1984, p. 65) identifies eight distinct concepts of policy. Three concepts are particularly relevant to this book:

1. Policy is an assertion of intents or goals,
2. policy is sanctioned behavior, and

3. policy is a norm of conduct characterized by consistency and regularity in some substantive action area.

In their 1991 book *School Policy,* Duke and Canady found that a commonly accepted definition of *policy* is still missing in both the literature and school practice. Their definition of *policy* as "an official action for a specified purpose or purposes" (Duke & Canady, 1991, p. 2) is straightforward and useful for practitioners and scholars alike.

This brief review of definitions of *policy* is provided as a basis for a common meaning of the term within this book. This discussion by no means reflects the depth of thought and effort given by many scholars to answering the question: "What does policy mean?" To answer the question for this book, the common elements of the above definitions form the basis of a working definition. The common elements are:

- A policy is a formal act.
- A policy has an agreed-upon intent.
- A policy is sanctioned or approved by an institutional body or authority.
- A policy provides a consistent standard for measuring performance.

Thus for purposes of this book, *policy* will mean "the official choice of a governmental body to achieve a stated purpose." The term *school policy* will refer to "the official choice of a school board or local school to achieve a purpose systematically and consistently." The narrow limitation of policy to the formal choices of school boards and other legitimate school authorities allows us to move into discussion of *how* these formal choices can be made more effectively. Both terms, *policy* and *school policy,* will be used interchangeably in this book.

Although a common complaint of school board members is their lack of "real local control" over problems facing schools, the fact remains that local districts and local schools have discretion in many areas (Wise, 1988). Often what they lack is the *resources* to provide a broad range of policy alternatives from which to choose. For instance, in 1989, President George Bush

and the National Governors' Association adopted six national goals for education. These national priorities or policies have been incorporated into state priorities for public education in many states. Yet discretion exists at the district and school levels to determine how best to achieve these goals or whether the goals will guide local decision making at all.

One more caveat before moving to the next section. Educators often use the term *policy* when they mean *practice.* For example, a new teacher might ask the principal, "What is your policy on a student's cutting class?" In fact, both individuals know the policy: Cutting class is not sanctioned behavior. What the teacher is trying to find out is what practice is required when this policy is violated. Does the teacher notify the office or the counselor? Who follows up to find out why the student was not in class? Does cutting class affect the student's grade? This book is focused on *how* to choose the most effective policy for a district or school when faced with a problem, *not* on what practices are most effective in implementing the policy choice.

1.2 What Is Policy Analysis?

In its most general sense, *policy analysis* is the process of locating information relevant to the identified purpose. In this broad sense, *policy analysis* is synonymous with *problem solving.* Policy analysis has two characteristic features: The information collected has a practical orientation and the information will help guide action rather than be an end in itself. So the aim of policy analysis is to provide decision makers with information that can be used to make reasoned judgments in finding solutions to practical problems.

In this book, *policy analysis* refers specifically to a five-step model called CASA: *clear and simple analysis.* Figure 1.1 represents the five steps and their relationships to one another.

The CASA model has the basic components found in all rational decision-making models. Indeed, the use of policy analysis is strongly influenced by the literature on rational decision making. This does not mean that other theoretical frameworks are

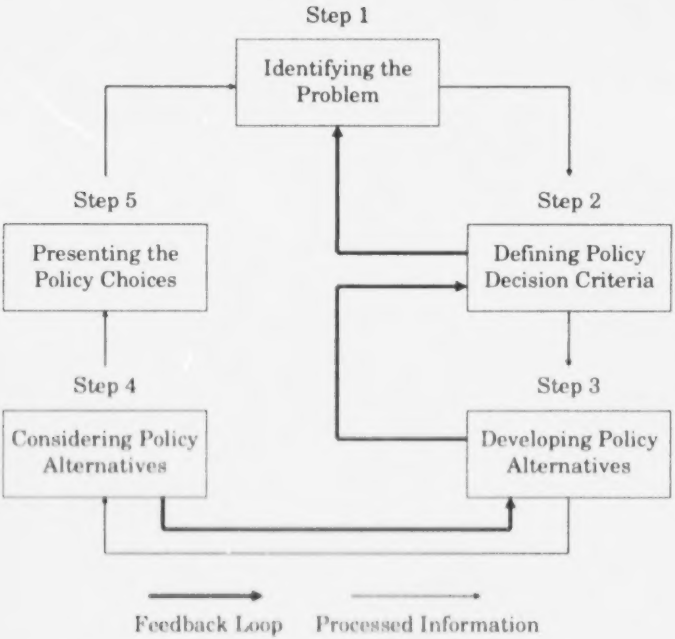

Figure 1.1. Clear and Simple Analysis (CASA) Model

not valid. Simply put, this book is meant to introduce the school administrator to a systematic approach to information searching and policymaking. A bounded rational approach is more easily understood. If the rational model had to be followed strictly in doing policy analysis in the public education arena (or in any governmental context), however, few public policies would result. This is due in large measure to the compromise required between rational decisions and political feasibility. The most logical and effective policy alternative may not be adopted because the political system will not accept it. We know that early intervention programs like Head Start reduce dropout rates and teenage pregnancy as well as increase graduation rates and the likelihood of finding employment after graduation. Yet fewer than one third of the eligible children in the United States are served by Head Start. Figures do not always speak for themselves, and

good ideas do not always win out. Policymakers and educators often are faced with the conflict between instructionally superior alternatives (up-to-date textbooks for each child) and politically feasible alternatives (keeping property tax rates low). Thus technically rational decisions may not be ethically sound. I do believe that good and just people use rational decision-making methods to find good and just policies. Yet no method can ensure any ethical outcome. That characteristic is supplied by the individuals involved in the policymaking process.

1.3 The CASA Model

This book is about the methods and tools of policy analysis, yet I readily admit that people do not usually act as the models say they should. An important notion to keep in mind is that, while policy analysis needs to be systematic, no model should be followed rigidly. The CASA model is offered as a framework for performing analyses in public school settings. For school administrators who are responsible for conducting a search for the "best" solution to a problem, the five steps of the CASA model will allow them to cut the task down to size and reduce subjectivity.

A. *Step 1: Identifying the Problem*

This seemingly simple step is not so easy to accomplish. In our own lives, we often find it difficult to pinpoint the specific problem causing us frustration. We may discuss the problem with several friends and relatives only to find that many more factors and perspectives add to the complexity of the problem, and not to its solution. This same dilemma occurs in policy analysis. This means that the initial statement of any problem should be considered preliminary at best.

Because conditions change, the policy analyst must continually ask whether the problem that precipitated the search for a solution still exists. Often the analyst has to redefine the problem during analysis as it changes form or takes on new dimensions. In following the CASA model, the school policy analyst

will analyze the best data available about the problem, settle on the criteria that will be used to evaluate alternative policies, think up possible alternatives, and then redefine the problem so that it can be reduced, controlled, and perhaps resolved with the information and resources on hand. Such an approach is often demanded by the immediacy of the problems found in public education and the short period during which the analysis must be conducted.

Problem definition is difficult because the objectives of school districts often are not clear, nor are they stated in a way as to make them discrete from other objectives. Sometimes school boards and their constituencies do not understand one another because of differences in terminology or jargon. But often public school organizations cannot or will not make clear statements of their objectives. Public schools have multiple missions; they serve many clientele; and they are mandated to respond to changing or conflicting public sentiment. Furthermore, power is diffused, particularly in large school districts, among boards, teacher unions, and well-organized advocacy groups. A recurrent problem in public schools illustrates some of the difficulties inherent in problem definition.

One of the six national goals identified by President Bush and the 50 governors is to have a 90% high school graduation rate by the year 2000. If an urban school district with a graduation rate less than 90% wants to develop a policy to achieve this goal, what is the problem they face? Is the problem one of excessively high dropout rates? Or is it more specifically the graduation requirements? A variety of factors may contribute to the problem: outdated or inappropriate curriculum, rigid tracking systems, poor tax support, state-mandated competency tests. The school district might define the problem as too few resources to meet the students' needs. The parents of students who do not graduate may define the problem as the school's inability to motivate potential dropouts. Some advocacy groups would blame teachers and administrators, calling them incompetent, insensitive, or both. Others might label public schools as "racist" or "biased" and unable ever to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Facing such a range of possibilities, the policy

analyst must continually define and refine the problem, making sure that the problem is one that can be addressed by policies over which the relevant policymakers have control.

The challenge during the first step of policy analysis is to state the problem meaningfully, to eliminate irrelevant material, to say it with numbers if possible, and to focus on the central and critical factors. After Step 1 is completed, the analyst should know whether a problem exists and whether it can be resolved by the policymakers. In addition, the policy analyst should be able to provide the first detailed statement of the problem and be able to estimate the time and resources the analysis will take. Later, as policy alternatives are developed and analyzed, other aspects of the problem may be identified that will call for another redefinition of the problem.

B. *Step 2: Defining Policy Decision Criteria*

As policymakers compare and select from among policy alternatives, they use various criteria to make a choice. Some commonly used decision criteria include cost, net benefit, effectiveness, efficiency, equity, administrative ease, legality, and political acceptability. School board members determine the criteria they will use to choose from among the policy alternatives. In some cases, the decision criteria are direct measures such as which alternative has the lowest per-pupil cost. Sometimes the criteria are indirectly provided through a statement of objectives, such as targeting a program that meets the needs of all students. More often than not, however, school policymakers cannot or will not identify the criteria they will use. In such cases, the analyst will have to infer what the criteria are based on previous policy decisions or on public statements of policymakers.

To continue with the example identified in Step 1, achieving the national goal of a 90% graduation rate, the school board would be the legitimate policymaking body to decide which policy alternative to choose. But the decision criteria to include would not be their decision alone. From the viewpoint of society at large (the public interest), both raising the graduation rate

(the number of ninth graders who graduate with their cohort four years later) *and* lowering the dropout rate (the number of secondary students who leave school annually without a high school diploma) may be appropriate criteria. Parents may favor criteria such as number of graduates who go on to postsecondary schools or who find jobs. Other criteria might be parental attitudes (change in level of satisfaction with schools) or local business attitudes (change in satisfaction with the potential employability of recent high school graduates). School district administrators may include cost, administrative, legal, and efficiency factors in their lists of decision criteria.

Seldom are decision criteria of equal value to policymakers. The analyst will have to identify those criteria that are central to the problem under analysis and most relevant to the key participants in the decision process. Clarification of decision criteria early in the process helps to avoid the temptation to rationalize preferred options later. Similar to the ongoing nature of problem identification, new decision criteria may be unearthed during later steps of the analysis.

C. *Step 3: Developing Policy Alternatives*

At this point in the process, the values, goals, and objectives of the policymakers and other involved parties will be clearer. Knowing what is sought and having identified the criteria to be used in judging alternatives help the analyst generate alternative policies. Continuation of the status quo (the no-action alternative) and incremental modification of the status quo are policies that always deserve consideration. During the problem identification step, similar problems elsewhere will have been located and the solutions tried in those locations can be considered.

The list of possible alternatives for even a relatively well-defined problem can be long, especially when variations and combinations of alternatives are considered. To return again to the problem of achieving the national goal for high school graduation rates, the first list of alternatives for improving graduation rates might include

(a) creating alternative schools for potential dropouts,
(b) changing graduation requirements,
(c) establishing a no-pass/no-play rule,
(d) revising the curriculum for potential dropouts,
(e) creating a guidance program for at-risk students,
(f) establishing an incentive program for at-risk students and potential employees,
(g) expanding early intervention programs, and
(h) maintaining the status quo.

Variations and combinations of these alternatives are also possible. Generating and combining alternatives may reveal aspects of the problem not identified earlier. Examining alternatives used by school districts in similar situations may provide additional insights into the problem. It also may be necessary to redefine the problem because of new information. The reformulated problem may lead to a revision of decision criteria. The challenge at this step in the CASA model is *to avoid prematurely limiting the number of policy options.*

Alternatives usually need to be generated quickly. The analyst has several methods available: library research to find what others have done, talking to experts (both other school officials and national consultants), and brainstorming. Discussion of specific methods for generating alternatives is found in Chapter 5. Unconventional alternatives should never be overlooked. As values and assumptions of participants change over time, yesterday's unacceptable policy option may be today's consensus choice.

D. *Step 4: Considering Policy Alternatives*

Although each step in CASA is important to sound policy analysis, the utility of the whole process truly rests on considering multiple alternatives against the problem as identified, then shaping the alternatives into programs. The analyst needs to determine probable impacts of each alternative. In addition, each alternative must be tested against the stated decision criteria.

The nature of the problem and the identified decision criteria will help lead the analyst to use appropriate methods to consider the alternatives. Both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used. To return to the graduation rate problem, a cost-effectiveness study could be done to estimate the least expensive program to reduce dropouts. Equity issues also have bearing on the alternatives. How will all racial and socioeconomic groups in the district be affected by changes in graduation requirements or alternative programs? Policy alternatives also must be examined from a political perspective. What will voters do at the polls if they perceive the schools to be ineffective at solving the graduation problem or if they believe some students suffer so that others can succeed? These are difficult questions that cannot be answered easily or quickly. There are methods, however, such as forecasting, scenario writing, and decision trees, that aid the analyst in completing the policy analysis in a timely and effective manner. Chapter 6 discusses these methods more specifically.

Careful consideration of alternatives will weed out realistic policy choices from pie-in-the-sky choices. Some alternatives may satisfy many decision criteria. Other alternatives can be discarded at this point because they violate the most salient decision criterion. Additional information may be needed to complete Step 4. At this step in CASA, the analyst may discover the problem has changed or that it longer exists. This often can occur when the problem identification step resulted in inaccurate or incomplete analysis. This is not necessarily a negative development, however. It simply confirms the suggestion that, because the first attempt at problem identification is done quickly, several iterations through CASA will result in more relevant choices.

E. Step 5: Presenting the Policy Choices

At this step in policy analysis, the relationship between the analyst and the policymaking body (the client) determines how to proceed. For example, the policymakers simply may be

presented with a list of policy alternatives. The alternatives could be ranked by decision criteria. To continue with the problem of achieving a 90% graduation rate, a board of education whose members are knowledgeable of each other's priorities and who enjoy community support may favor a straightforward presentation of alternatives with the strengths and weaknesses of each choice spelled out. Some boards prefer that the analyst present a strong argument for the "best" option. In some cases, the analyst may believe that a particular option has such merit that a strong case should be made. In any case, a report that includes case scenarios may be the appropriate method to assist the board in choosing a policy direction.

In cases where the board of education is faced with competing political groups, and little consensus about anything exists, the analyst may lay out the options by displaying the political pros and cons. Use of political feasibility analysis can answer questions like these: What will the board have to give up or promise to have the policy alternative implemented? Will new administrative structures be required? Does the board have the influence to implement a more comprehensive alternative as opposed to an alternative that solves part of the problem? Rarely is there one "best" alternative. Not only will different alternatives appeal to different political groups, but more than one alternative may solve the identified problem. Because making the policy choice is only part of the decision-making process, the policy analyst can help the decision makers consider the tasks and responsibilities involved in planning for the implementation and evaluation of the final choice.

1.4 Why Conduct a Local Policy Analysis?

There are two reasons to conduct systematic policy analysis at the local level. The first reason is based on the management principle that problems need to be solved by those who will be implementing the solutions. For example, if a district wants all schools to have an orderly climate conducive to learning, each school's personnel need to identify the local problems keeping

their school from achieving the goal. For a junior high school, the problem may be identified as outdated discipline standards. For the elementary school, the climate may be adversely affected by poor instructional supervision and class size. For the high school, the problem may be a combination of a nonaligned curriculum, inappropriate tracking of students, and inconsistent homework rules. If the district administrators were to decide that schools do not have orderly climates because there is no standard, districtwide discipline code, much effort toward developing a standard discipline would be wasted because neither the elementary school nor the high school fits the solution. Thus local school discretion in analyzing individual school problems and determining local school policies is worth the investment of resources.

The second reason for encouraging systematic policy analysis at the local level is closely related to the first. Many recommendations for reforming public schools have called for empowering teachers and parents. *Empowerment* means different things to different groups. But a common method for bringing more groups into meaningful contact with schools is through a systematic problem-solving process. Parents have perspectives on the curriculum or discipline or homework that are relevant to the effectiveness of any alternative chosen by the school or district. Local business people interact with students, teachers, and administrators in many ways on a daily basis. Teachers are also taxpayers, parents, homeowners, and voters whose experiences can add to the effectiveness of policy analysis. Undertaking systematic analysis of problems does *not* mean that administrators and boards of education will give up responsibility for making the final choice of policy options. It does mean less reliance on "seat-of-the-pants" decision making.

1.5 Practical Principles for Policy Analysis

Learning how to approach policy problems and how to choose appropriate basic methods during the policy analysis process takes time. There simply is no substitute for practice. As you

encounter problems in your school or district, think about what information you would need and what basic methods you would use. For effective school administrators, this habit of approaching problems analytically is second nature. The following suggestions are reflective of effective policy analysis experience.

(1) Practice focusing on the central decision criteria of the problem. What factor of the problem is most important to the policymakers who will make the choice? Do they want the least expensive option? Do they want quick results? Focusing quickly on the central criterion or criteria will help identify needed information. After locating initial information about the problem, return to the criteria and see whether they still seem appropriate.

(2) Avoid the "favorite bag of tricks" approach to analyzing policy. If you are an experienced administrator, you have preferred ways of dealing with problems. Some people may begin work on a policy problem because it lends itself to their favorite method. As the old saying goes, "If all you have is a hammer, then every problem begins to look like a nail." This book should help expand your repertoire of analytical methods. Just because the policy problems are complex, however, does not mean that the methods to gather information for problem identification need to be complex. Try the simplest appropriate method along with common sense first. But avoid the tendency to rely only on your favorite bag of tricks.

(3) Make a straightforward presentation of the analysis. Keep your audience in mind. Remember that boards of education represent your community and are not professional educators. Make your analysis inform the board as well as the community. The analysis should be simple and easy to follow. Avoid the desire to tell the decision-making body everything you did. Another aspect of a straightforward presentation is to provide details of any calculations you made in your analysis. Show the analysis step by step and do not simply give the results of the analysis.

This does not mean simpleminded presentations but it does mean that complex or convoluted explanations of the policy analysis process should be avoided.

(4) Check your information. It is important to develop a healthy skepticism of widely held beliefs about matters of education policy. These beliefs have a way of limiting how the problem gets defined and the types of policy alternatives that get suggested. Analyze all sources of policy information. Never rely on a single source. Understand how the information was generated; if the method is not clear or is unknown, discount the validity of the data. Always check out information closely tied to the client's specific decision criteria. Because information depends on definitions, make sure you have a common understanding of the definitions relevant to the policy problem. For example, if an information source states that the majority of the community favors a strong discipline code, find out how "majority," "community," and "strong discipline code" are being defined and measured.

(5) Learn to deal with uncertainty. This is a difficult principle to practice. School administrators often are called upon to reduce uncertainty and to clarify the situation. The reduction of uncertainty is one of the intended outcomes of the policy analysis but, during the process, uncertainty is always present in every step.

(6) Give the policymakers analysis, not decisions. The policymaking body decides which policy option will solve the problem. The presentation of the analysis will include critical assumptions, values, and uncertainties so that decision makers can weigh the consequences of each alternative. In some cases, the policymaking body will ask for a recommendation, but typically this happens when boards and administrators acting as analysts have developed a strong and trusting relationship. In most cases, the urge to be both policy analyst and policymaker should be avoided because, fundamentally, accountability for

policy decisions at the local level rests with the board of education. What research and evaluation have shown is that good analysis details factors so that decision makers can assess the consequences of each alternative. Poor analysis simply recommends action.

(7) There is no such thing as rational and complete analysis. Although this seems to contradict the statements made in this chapter, this principle really speaks to the quality of analysis as compared with the context of the time and resources available. No analyst ever has enough time to find every reasonable alternative or to check every source for absolute accuracy. There are never enough resources to eliminate all uncertainty and conflicting values. This does not mean that clear and simple analysis is not worth the effort or that analysts are guilty of unethical practice. Rather, there comes a time in all policy analysis when the search and analysis must stop and the alternatives must be given to the policymakers for a decicion. In public education, as in any public institution, time is always limited and resources must be stretched.

1.6 Organization of the Book

The purpose of this book is to help school administrators locate, analyze, and use relevant information to create effective policies. Chapter 2 describes how to locate policy-relevant information in an efficient and effective way. School administrators need to know where to find information quickly, and they need to have a systematic approach to get from problem awareness to policy implementation. Chapter 2 offers guidelines to achieve both needs.

Chapter 3 introduces and explains Step 1 of the CASA model: defining the policy problem. Three methods useful for identifying the policy problem are back-of-the-envelope calculations, decision trees, and political analysis.

Chapter 4 discusses Step 2 of the CASA model: defining policy decision criteria. There are four categories of criteria commonly used by decision makers to choose the best policy. The criteria are technical feasibility, economic and financial possibility, political viability, and administrative operability.

Chapter 5 focuses on Step 3 of the CASA model: developing policy alternatives. The methods for accomplishing this step include status quo analysis, developing typologies, brainstorming, and modifying existing policies.

Chapter 6 describes Step 4 of the CASA model: considering policy alternatives. Two categories of methods will be presented: forecasting and evaluation. Methods within each category will be explained.

Chapter 7 completes the CASA model with a discussion of the presentation of policy choices to the decision makers. A format for a policy analysis report is given.

Finally, a Troubleshooting Guide helps the reader locate information within the book more readily. It is a practical tool for all policy analysts as they begin their own information searches.

Key Terms

- *CASA model.* Clear and simple analysis of problems facing schools using a five-step process: defining the policy issue, defining policy decision criteria, developing policy alternatives, considering policy alternatives, and presenting policy choices.
- *Decision criteria.* Specific statements, rules, or standards about the dimensions of the policy problem that will be used by the policymakers to evaluate alternatives and make a decision.
- *Policy.* The official choice of a governmental body to achieve a stated purpose.
- *Policy analysis.* The process of locating information relevant to the identified purpose.
- *Practice.* A specific program or action or procedure enacted to obtain a desired end; often used as a synonym for *policy.*
- *School policy.* The official choice of a school board or local school to achieve a purpose systematically and consistently.

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2

Expanding the Information Search

In our information society, which produces thousands of data bases and other resources daily, most decision makers rely primarily on traditional information sources. More often than not, school administrators will spend much of their time trying to determine the best solutions to problems that recur daily or annually. How can teachers improve the academic performance of at-risk students? What daily schedule will allow for both student need and teacher supply? If the answers cannot be found through conventional sources, the decision is made with the limited information at hand. This does not always have to be the case.

Information is an important key to making effective decisions. But why, if we are living in an information society, do

most of us base our decisions on hearsay, headlines, and outdated or incomplete information? Two reasons seem particularly relevant to this book:

1. School administrators suffer from information overload and
2. school administrators have been inadequately trained to find information.

Information overload is probably the more obvious of the two reasons. As professionals, school administrators are bombarded with written material from professional organizations, from state departments of education, from their own school bureaucracies, from research and training institutions, and from their own experiences. As residents of the United States in the last decade of the twentieth century, we receive all kinds of information about schools from television, from radio, from newspapers and magazines, from neighbors, and from our children. The problem is rarely one of not having enough information. Quite the contrary, most school administrators suffer from lack of training to use information to make reasoned choices.

Chapter 2 is organized into four sections. The first section provides pointers on how to get organized to gather information. The second section gives names and addresses of traditional sources of information. The third section discusses the process of finding experts to interview. This infrequently used technique of gathering information will assist policy analysts in quickly getting policy-relevant information for the first four steps of CASA. The last section details how the information search fits into the policy analysis process.

2.1 Getting Started

The CASA model is driven by information. The initial step in the search for relevant information is finding the very best written information sources on the policy issue. Although some of the most beneficial findings will come from talking to experts,

the information search should not begin with them. It is more efficient first to read and learn about the subject and then speak with experts. To be able to ask the right questions and probe for further details requires a rudimentary knowledge base on the part of the policy analyst.

The policy analyst should have a plan for recording the information found in written sources as well as that from the "expert" sources. This need not be elaborate, but it should be systematic and consistent. This is particularly important if a committee is charged with conducting the policy analysis and more than one person will be searching for and gathering information.

Getting information from experts is no different than any other communication interaction. When a principal deals with a student who has been sent to the office by a teacher for some infraction of the discipline code, he or she knows it will take at least two conversations to find out what happened: one with the student and one with the teacher. In some cases, additional conversations may be necessary to resolve the problem. Principles of effective communication are as important in interviewing experts as they are in other aspects of educational administration. Experienced policy analysts know it is going to take a number of telephone calls before they find the person who can provide the specific answers they are seeking. Patience and persistence are essential. Because most experts work in formal bureaucracies, getting the runaround on the telephone will not be unusual. This means that, once you get connected with the right person, you must set the tone of the discussion in such a way that you can get the information you need. Complaining about the runaround is not the way to do this. Getting information from another person requires a different set of skills than retrieving information from a journal or an electronic data base.

A. *Basic Interview Pointers*

(1) Be pleasant from the first hello. Even if this is the tenth time you have repeated your request, it is not the fault of the expert on the other end of the line. No one is going to be helpful if your voice is impatient.

(2) Be candid about your purpose. Explain to the source why you are asking for information. If you appear reluctant to share your purpose or to explain what will happen to the information, your expert will be reluctant too. If you cannot share everything, explain that to the source.

(3) Be concise. State your problem simply and then listen. If you do all the talking, you reduce your chances of getting the information you are seeking.

(4) Be courteous. After you have explained your purpose in calling an expert, ask an open-ended question. People in general and experts in particular like to share their knowledge with others if they feel their authority will not be questioned. A positive assessment of your source's expertise will serve you well.

(5) Share information if you can. If you have information that your source does not have and if you will not be violating the trust of another source, share your information. If you do not have any relevant information to share, it is still a good idea to call back when you are further along in your information search.

(6) Write a thank you note. Always acknowledge the assistance a person has given you, even if the information turned out to be of little use. This is particularly important if you interviewed the individual in person.

2.2 Gathering Information From Traditional Sources

The first thing to do is to find the right library. If you live in a major urban area, you have access to three kinds of libraries: public libraries, university libraries, and specialty libraries. If you live in a rural or isolated community, you will probably have to travel to get to your traditional information sources. Do as much of the preparation by telephone ahead of time so that your trip will be productive.

A. *Public Libraries*

Find the main branch of the public library and seek out the reference librarian. Whether you have narrowed the scope of your policy problem to looking for evaluation data on the effectiveness of in-school suspensions or you are beginning with the broad subject of discipline, you will find this information specialist to be helpful in locating sources quickly and efficiently. If you do not have a main branch of the public library near you, call your community branch and explain what you need. Someone there will direct you to the appropriate library.

B. *University Libraries*

Most college and university libraries are open to the public. School administrators can use their alumni privileges if they find the reference service closed to public access. Many administrators and teachers who are going to graduate school in addition to working in the schools have access through their student status. Once you gain access to a collegiate library, ask for the reference librarian who specializes in education. This individual will help you use all the resources available, including written or electronic data bases. If you do not have a college or university nearby, contact the Association of College and Research Libraries, which is part of the American Library Association. They will help you find a library appropriate to your needs at no cost.

Association of College and Research Libraries
50 Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611

C. *Specialty Libraries*

This type of library is less accessible than the previous two. Examples include collections belonging to museums, corporations, and governmental agencies. Access often is limited to employees, members, or individuals who have applied for and received permission to use sources in the special collection. Still, this is a source that may provide the policy alternative that fits your

needs and decision criteria. Two directories are available that list thousands of specialty libraries by topic:

1. *Subject Collections,* published by R. R. Bowker
2. *Special Directory of Special Libraries and Information Centers,* published by Gale Research

Ask the reference librarian at the public library where these volumes are available in your geographic locale.

D. *New York Public Library*

The mid-Manhattan branch has free reference services and regularly answers questions from around the country. Its collections include business, education, history, and science.

New York Public Library
Mid-Manhattan Branch
455 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10016
(212) 340-0849

E. *Library of Congress*

The U.S. Library of Congress has the largest collection in the world. It has more than 20 million volumes and pamphlets, more than a million technical reports, 3.5 million maps, and 34 million manuscripts. The office of most usefulness to the policy analyst is the Telephone Reference Service. Information not available in other libraries is usually found in the Library of Congress. In addition, the library has photoduplication services. If you are in a hurry, however, the six- to eight-week turnaround time will be a factor.

1. Telephone Reference Service:
   Washington, D.C.
   (202) 707-5522

2. Photoduplication Service:
   Washington, D.C.
   (202) 707-5640

F. Doctoral Dissertations

Many published and unpublished doctoral dissertations focus on policy issues highly relevant to school administrators acting as policy analysts. You can gain access to this data base either at the nearest university library or by directly contacting the publisher of dissertation abstracts. A computerized search by standard subjects can be done. Contact

University Microfilms International
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
(800) 521-0600

G. Associations

Associations are a rich source of information. There seems to be no topic too narrow nor interest group too small to form a national association. Associations have knowledgeable and helpful people who will send you information related to their special interest. To find an association that deals with your policy area of interest, call the reference desk at your public library and ask if they have

Encyclopedia of Associations, published by Gale

After two telephone calls, I found two associations whose specific interests were related to school discipline.

1. National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Other Alternatives in Schools
   Temple University
   253 Ritter Annex
   Philadelphia, PA 19122
   (215) 787-6091

2. National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment
   155 West Main Street
   Room 100-B
   Columbus, OH 43215
   (614) 221-8829

Calls to each office resulted in my receiving several pamphlets and booklets with statistics about discipline practices and problems as well as ideas for possible policy alternatives to corporal punishment.

H. *Government Printing Office (GPO)*

The U.S. government is the largest publisher in the world. Every year, tens of thousands of books, magazines, and other printed materials are produced by federal bureaus and departments. There are several ways to get information about publications related specifically to your policy topic. One way is to call the federal agency that specializes in the topic and ask for their list of publications. This is not a quick approach, however. Both *The Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* and the *Subject Bibliography Index* are simpler and faster for locating the necessary information. To contact the GPO, call

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C.
(202) 783-3238

I. *Other Government Sources*

An excellent source of statistics is the *Census Catalog & Guide*. This guide lists and describes census products, services, and programs as well as complete ordering information. Much of the Bureau of the Census's products are free or inexpensive. This invaluable information can be ordered by calling or writing to the superintendent of documents (see the previous citation).

The *Statistical Abstract of the United States* has a wealth of data. This book is a standard summary of statistics on the so-

cial, political, and economic organization of the United States. Major sections include education, state and local government finances, federal government finances, and human services. This too is available by calling the superintendent of documents (see the previous citation).

J. *ERIC*

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national education information system responsible for developing, maintaining, and providing access to the world's largest education research data base. The ERIC system includes a network of clearinghouses, each of which acquires and reviews documents and prepares indices and abstracts. Each clearinghouse also provides a variety of user services including responding to requests for information. To find which clearinghouse includes the policy topic of interest to you, contact

Office of Educational Research and Information
555 New Jersey Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20208
(202) 357-6008

Most college and university libraries and many urban public libraries have the ERIC information retrieval system on CD-ROM, a combination of a microcomputer and compact disc player. This has greatly reduced the amount of time it takes to search using traditional library resources.

K. *State Information*

A reliable first stop to find information related to specific school policy topics in your own state is the department of education or public instruction. This administrative agency is a valuable source of statistics, regulations, and information about school-related problems. Although most educators know the department of education monitors federal and state compliance rules, requires and collects reports, and provides technical assistance

to schools and districts, they have not used the department to locate state-specific information sources about policy problems.

Every state also has a general information office. These offices are staffed by people trained to help you find what you need, even if you are unsure yourself. If you are still unable to find the relevant information, call the governor's office. Currently, all 50 governors have education aides. They will try to match you up with the appropriate department.

Finally, a vast amount of research information is housed in the state library. It is the official repository of all state documents as well as a local source of many federal documents. Collections that have particular relevance to policy analysis include state statistical profiles, annual reports by all state agencies, historical documents, and business and economic reports. As with all libraries mentioned in this book, state libraries have professionals trained to help the user find information.

L. Current Education Information on Line

A free electronic bulletin board service is available 24 hours a day. Its education data base includes bulletins and announcements of tapes with data from government-sponsored research reports. The service can be accessed by using your telephone, a modem, and your microcomputer with communication software.

OERI Electronic Bulletin Board
Department of Education
(202) 222-4922 or (202) 626-9853

2.3 Gathering Information From Experts

After you have gathered information from the traditional sources and have organized the information into the first draft of your problem statement, it is time to interview the experts. An expert is anyone who has in-depth knowledge about a specific topic. There are many famous education experts such as

John Goodlad and Albert Shanker, but the majority of experts are not well known to educators or the public. As a policy analyst conducting a search for information to define the policy problem or to find alternative policy options, the experts you want to find will be in universities, school districts, government offices, at newspapers, or in other specialized positions.

Robert Berkman in his book *Find It Fast* identifies nine kinds of experts who can provide pertinent information to anyone who asks. The nine types include book authors, writers and editors of journals, experts cited in journal or newspaper articles, convention speakers (not the keynote speaker), federal government personnel, association staffers, company personnel, consultants, and those who work directly with the technology of some activity.

Using the books and articles found in the library or from one of the traditional sources listed in the second section of this chapter, start identifying your pool of experts using the names of authors. If you do not know where to contact the author, a telephone call to the publisher of a book or journal is the place to start. Once the author is located, organize your questions ahead of time. This is a chance to ask for clarification of points made in the books and articles or to seek out additional facts or examples. Another source of expertise is periodicals. The reporters and editors of local newspapers and specialized publications like *Education Week* are typically nontechnical professionals who are easy to find, easy to talk to, and very helpful.

A useful source of addresses and telephone numbers of various institutions that can be consulted to locate experts is

National Directory of Addresses and Telephone Numbers, published by General Information, Inc.

Probably the largest pool of experts on any possible policy topic is found with the federal government. An integral part of their jobs is sharing information with the public, but the size of this pool is a barrier to its effective use. If you do not have specific names, be prepared to be transferred. As with other information

sources, there is a clearinghouse set up by the federal government to help citizens obtain information about programs or agencies. These Federal Information Centers (FIC) are located around the country. The national headquarters is in Washington, D.C., and can be reached by calling (202) 566-1937.

A. *Experts in the Federal Government*

Listed below are federal agencies where individuals with expertise in school-related topics can be found. These experts will answer specific questions, provide additional sources of information, indicate technical or research reports completed by their agencies, and refer you to other individuals who might have information relevant to school discipline policies and practices. If you are in need of information about a particular educational issue, use the first listing:

1. Office of Public Affairs
   Department of Education
   (202) 732-4576
2. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
   (800) 424-1616: Hot line for referrals
3. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
   Department of Education
   (202) 357-6050
4. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
   Department of Education
   (202) 732-1723
5. Office of Vocational and Adult Education
   Department of Education
   (202) 732-2251

B. *Experts in Other Agencies*

The network of sponsored research projects and government-supported agencies is another rich source of experts. Just a few suggestions include the following:

1. Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools
   Johns Hopkins University
   (301) 338-7570
2. National Center of Effective Secondary Schools
   University of Wisconsin—Madison
   (608) 263-7575
3. Reading Research and Education Center
   University of Illinois
   (217) 333-2552
4. Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing
   University of California, Los Angeles

Talking with experts and using their knowledge to enhance your search for information is an excellent source of nontraditional information. It is also the way to overcome information overload. And there is no better way to have your questions answered than by talking with the person who wrote the book, conducted the study, analyzed the data, or developed the theory. The barrier stopping most professionals from contacting one another is the belief that experts do not want to talk about their knowledge. This is simply not the rule. All you have to lose to test this statement is the cost of a telephone call.

2.4 Gathering Information as a Means to an End

Policy analysis in the educational setting is a process of locating information relevant to the problems found in schools. The information gathered has no value in and of itself. The purpose of this discussion of traditional and expert sources of information is to assist school administrators in expanding the information search process beyond a limited pool. Because the search for information is integral to every step of policy analysis, the policy analyst must look for diverse sources too. As the CASA flowchart in Figure 2.1 shows, the use of traditional published sources and experts with relevant knowledge and experience

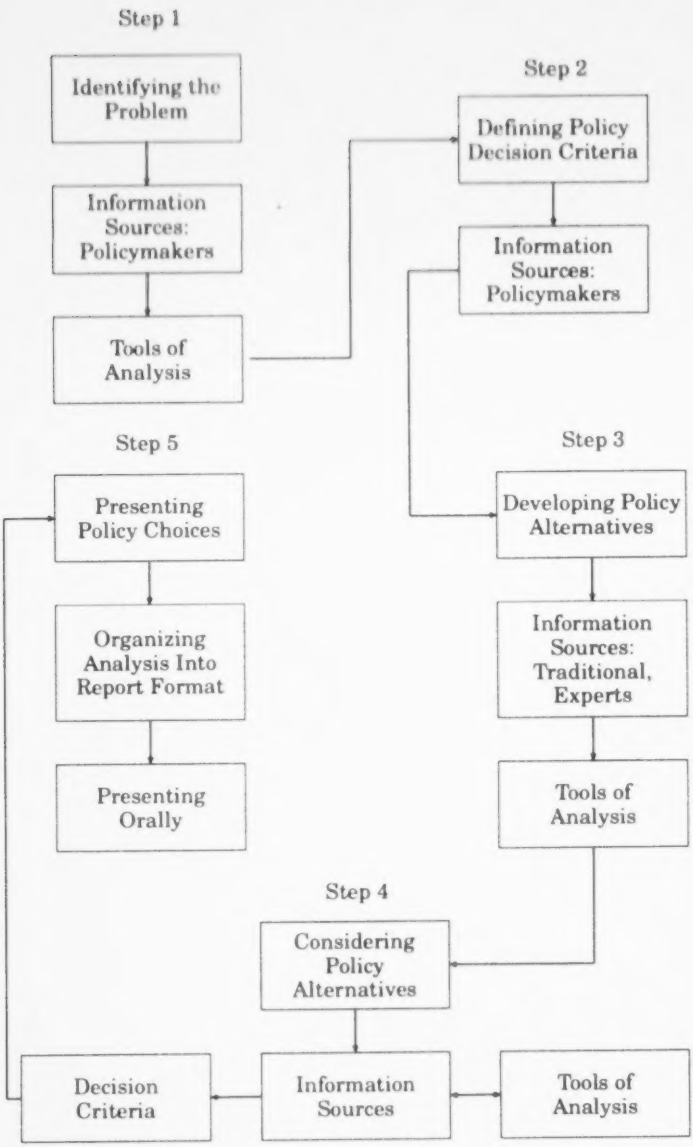

Figure 2.1. CASA Flowchart

will enhance the likelihood that policy decisions meet their intended outcomes.

Figure 2.1 depicts the relationships between information and policy analysis outcomes. The quality of the final policy choice is dependent on the efficiency and integrity of the information used and on the sufficiency of the analytical tools.

Reference

Berkman, R. I. (1990). *Find it fast.* New York: Harper & Row.

3

What Is the Real Problem?

Before beginning this section, review Figure 3.1. The more time spent defining the policy problem, the better the fit between the final policy choice and the policy needs. Without a statement of the problem that includes identifying the critical factors and verifying that a problem exists, the policy analyst will find subsequent steps in the policy analysis process difficult to accomplish. The problem identification and verification step of policy analysis delimits the range of problems and possible actions.

During this part of the analysis, several interrelationships will begin to be clarified. First, the question of how the problem is defined within the specific school or district setting is answered. Next, the matter of who is concerned about the policy issue or problem is clarified. Then, questions about what factors

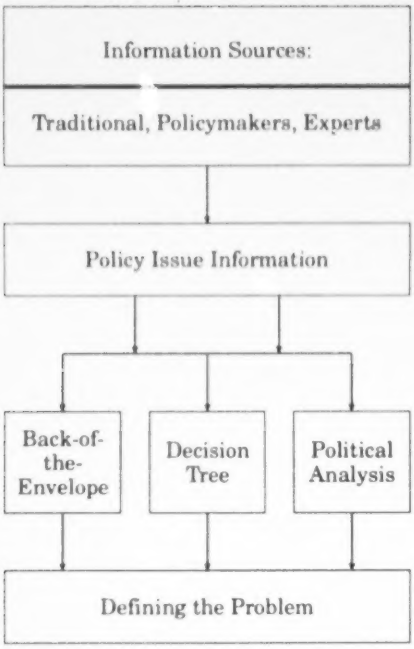

Figure 3.1. Step 1 of the CASA Model: Identifying the Problem

will be considered in the analysis must be answered. Answering these three questions will lead to possible solutions to the policy problem.

The policy analyst should start the problem definition process by consulting traditional sources of information, which means the pertinent conceptual literature and program evaluation studies as well as talking with the policymakers. Look through the suggested information sources in Chapter 2. Once an initial working definition of the problem is established, the policy analyst will find talking with experts more productive. The information and insights experts provide assist in completing the next revision of the problem statement.

Three clear and simple analytical methods will help the policy analyst take the information gathered from traditional, expert,

and policymaking sources and develop a policy statement. The first section of this chapter explains back-of-the-envelope calculations. Then decision trees are described. Last, the applicability of political analysis is discussed.

3.1 Back-of-the-Envelope Calculations

The quality of debate over most problems in schools would be considerably improved with the use of a few simple statistics. As part of the first step in defining the problem, simple "back-of-the-envelope" calculations should be performed. These will place boundaries around the problem and indicate both the direction and the magnitude of the problem.

Back-of-the-envelope calculations are simple ways to estimate the numbers that are important to the initial attempts at defining the problem. Fairley and Mosteller (1977) have suggested four basic methods for determining unknown numbers:

1. Look up the number in a reference source.
2. Collect the number through a systematic survey.
3. Guess the number.
4. Get experts to help you guess the number.

The following story illustrates the utility of these four methods. Superintendent Jones reviewed the state-developed criteria for awarding the rank of "excellent" to school districts. He believed that his affluent suburban school district, Upper Sinclair, fit all the categories of excellence except for attendance rates. The State Board of Education prescribed a figure of 96% average daily attendance for all schools within a district as the minimum level of excellence. Upper Sinclair has two high schools, three middle schools, and seven K-5 elementary schools. Jones asked the Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services, Paul Serrano, to study the attendance problem and then to propose a policy for improving attendance at all schools.

Serrano first reviewed the traditional literature on attendance practices. From this search, he identified three common

issues found in schools: confusion over the purposes of school attendance policies, legal and regulatory constraints placed on local attendance policymaking, and ineffectiveness of popular attendance practices in achieving their goals. With this information, Serrano was able to develop an interview protocol and organize a study of Upper Sinclair using back-of-the-envelope calculations. Serrano used many of the methods described below.

Using Reference Sources

1. Check the details of how attendance statistics are derived in Upper Sinclair. Various sources may use different operational definitions.
2. Use multiple sources.
3. Avoid sources that do not offer operational definitions.

Using Surveys

1. In most cases, there usually is not enough time to create a formal survey, but minisurveys can provide enough data to form the initial problem statement.
2. Look for a national or state survey done on a regular basis by a reputable organization.

Guessing

1. Rates that do not vary much from place to place can sometimes be used to guess an absolute number when used with a base population; for example, self-reported rates of drug use by teenagers can be multiplied by the school population to guess the number of teenagers who use drugs.
2. One known variable can be used to guess another if a relationship between the two is known; for example, population growth rates in an area can be used to determine numbers of new students in a district. If the population has grown 5%, attendance problems have grown by at least that figure.
3. Boundaries can and should be placed on "guesstimates."

4. In some cases, there are rules of thumb that can help derive real numbers. Occasional reevaluation of such rules is advisable.

Using Experts

1. Consult experts but be clear about the specificity of the data you want them to estimate.

Once the basic data have been found, back-of-the-envelope calculations using ordinary mathematical operations (like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) can be completed. Paul Serrano was able to put boundaries around the extent of the attendance problem in Upper Sinclair by using these methods. He called the Department of Education in his state and was able to get attendance figures for the last five years for high school students in schools similar to those in his district. Then he called attendance officers in surrounding districts and found no one had attendance data beyond the current year for elementary and middle school students. So he requested that each elementary and middle school send a copy of its attendance reports for the current school year. He asked the principals to estimate their school's average daily attendance. He talked with the state department official who compiled the statewide attendance data to get the operational definition of attendance and any exceptions that were allowed. After sorting through all the information he had gathered and noting his questions, he decided to call the experts. First, he called the OERI hot line for referrals, at (800) 424-1616, and was directed to the expert in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, who discussed attendance studies, policies, and practices. The federal expert referred him to an expert in another division who was able to give Serrano statistical trends on attendance for middle school students.

Serrano was then able to estimate attendance rates for the three middle schools by taking the rates given to him by the OERI expert and applying them to his district. He had the actual figures for Upper Sinclair's high schools for the last three years. He randomly picked daily attendance figures from the

current year for the elementary schools and estimated an attendance rate for each school. From these back-of-the-envelope calculations, Serrano was able to determine that potential attendance problems did indeed exist at four of the schools in the district.

Back-of-the-envelope calculation methods can help establish some of the key dimensions of the policy problem. Such basic policy questions as the following can be answered:

- How many students or schools are affected by the problem?
- What is the likely magnitude of the impact of a districtwide policy to improve the problem?

3.2 Decision Trees

Quick decision analysis is an analytical technique and a decision-making tool that can help identify critical components of problems as well as strengths and weaknesses of alternative options. This analytical approach is very helpful at the problem definition step of policy analysis because some of the uncertainties and unknowns that affect problem definition are clarified. Behn and Vaupel (1982) use simple decision trees with only a few branches to capture the essence of the policy problem. They call their technique a *decision sapling*. As shown in Figure 3.2, a decision sapling visually displays the most basic decision dilemma involving uncertainty. There are only two alternatives, with one more risky than the other. There are only two possible outcomes for the risky alternative. The dilemma is whether to gamble on winning the best consequence by selecting the risky alternative or to avoid the chance of getting the worst consequence by selecting the known outcome of the no-risk alternative. This technique is another method for the policy analyst to use in identifying the problem.

The usefulness of this quick analysis decision tree is made clear by returning to the attendance policy issue in the Upper Sinclair School District. In Figure 3.3, Serrano identified two alternatives: the no-risk alternative (do nothing) and the risky

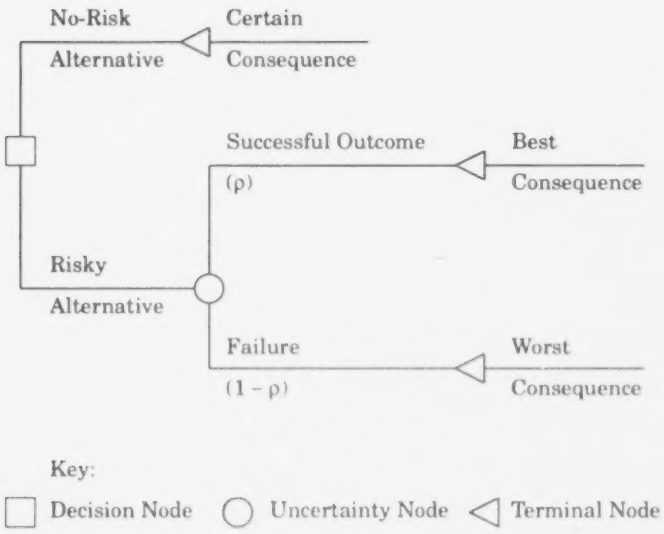

Figure 3.2. Decision Sapling
SOURCE: From R. D. Behn and J. W. Vaupel, *Quick Analysis for Busy Decision Makers* (1982, Basic Books, p. 41).

alternative (punish absenteeism). The no-risk alternative has a known, middle-of-the-road consequence: maintenance of the status quo. The risky alternative has two possible outcomes: lowering absenteeism rates (the desired outcome) and worsening absenteeism (the worst outcome because of program start-up and maintenance costs and because the criteria for an excellence award would not be met). Superintendent Jones and Assistant Superintendent Serrano must determine the probabilities of the best outcome and the worst outcome (1 minus the probability of the best outcome) to decide whether to pursue the risky or the no-risk alternative. An estimate of probabilities can be made based on the information gathered in the initial problem identification search.

When thinking about a policy problem, the policy analyst should assess whether the key characteristics of the problem can be structured into a decision analysis format like the deci-

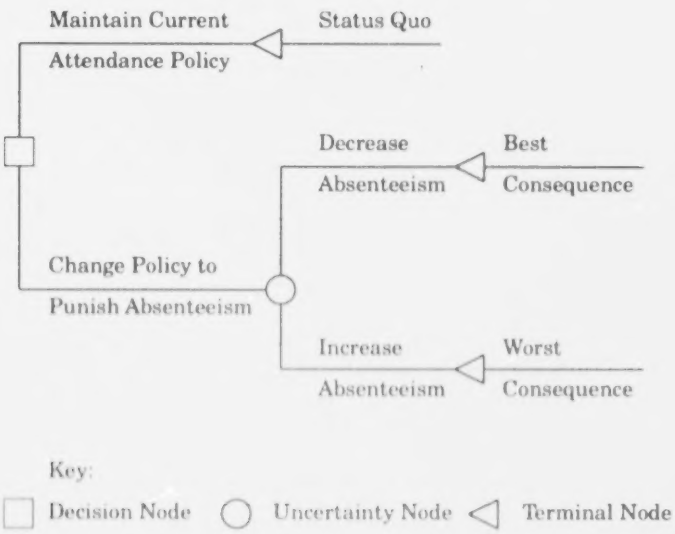

Figure 3.3. Decision Sapling for Upper Sinclair Attendance Analysis

sion sapling. Often problems can be successfully broken down early in the problem identification process by using this method.

3.3 Political Analysis

Public schools exist in the political arena. Until the 1960s, few educators wanted to admit this fact. Many groups have power over what happens in schools: legislators (state and federal); governors; mayors; the president of the United States; corporate and business leaders; unions; advocacy groups representing the handicapped, athletes, racial and ethnic minorities, and women; professional organizations; colleges and universities; the PTA; the media; and student organizations—to name a few. Some or all of these political factors may be important in the completion of a systematic problem statement.

TABLE 3.1. Political Analysis of Upper Sinclair: Problem Identification Step

		Alternatives	
Who	*What*	*Why*	*How*
Maintain current attendance policy			
PTA president	not a high priority	little parent interest	influence on superintendent
3 middle school principals	only a small number of students	resists change	influence on superintendent
Change attendance policy			
Local chamber of commerce	poor work ethic of students	few viable employees	clout with board
president of school board	need higher standards	establish control	support from voters
teacher union	current rules burdensome on teachers	establish control	support from teachers

In a broad sense, politics are integral to understanding the context of policy analysis. But certain political factors must be considered in the first step of analysis, namely, in identifying, defining, and verifying the policy problem. The school administrator who plays the role of policy analyst should incorporate four factors into this analysis.

The four political factors are best described as simple questions, easily recognized as the basis of all journalistic investigations and stories: who, what, why, and how (see Table 3.1). The *who* refers to the political groups or individuals who will be concerned with the specific type of problem being analyzed. For example, who will be affected if attendance policies are altered? Who will benefit or lose if the district wants to improve the at-

tendance rates of all students? The *what* refers to the values and beliefs held by the key political groups or individuals. What does each group believe about the attendance problem? What do individuals see as desirable means and ends? The *why* refers to the needs, goals, or motives of the political groups or individuals. What is making them get involved? What will it take to satisfy them? The *how* refers to the resources controlled by the political groups or individuals. What does a group have that can be used to get what it wants? Often this means money or financial resources, but it also can take the form of bargaining skills, legislative clout, personal friendship, or future rewards.

This political analysis is not a formal analysis in the sense of using the CASA model. Experienced policymakers and school administrators analyze the political context constantly because it is hard to think of education policy problems that do not have political ramifications. Yet the beginning school policy analyst should be cautious about political analysis. Politics are only one criterion in the decision-making step. Although it is important to be aware of the political groups and their values and motives, problem identification must include other information as well.

Tips for Political Analysis

1. Check all sources of information.
2. Use several sources for political information.
3. Look for underlying issues.
4. Share your political analysis with others to see whether they interpret information in the same way.
5. Remember that political information is only part of the data base.

Key Terms

❑ *Back-of-the-envelope calculations.* Simple ways to estimate numbers that are important to defining the direction and magnitude of a problem and are also helpful for establishing key dimensions of a problem; a problem definition technique.

- *Consequence.* What one outcome means to those it affects, measured in some way meaningful to the policymaker.
- *Decision.* A point on a decision tree where the outcome is a matter of the decision maker's choice.
- *Decision sapling.* A simplified version of a decision tree with only a few branches to capture the essence of the policy dilemma.
- *Decision tree.* A graphic representation of the critical parts of a policy problem including decision points, uncertainties, outcomes, and consequences.
- *Expert.* Anyone who has in-depth knowledge about a specific topic.
- *Outcome.* One possible result of decisions and uncertainty.
- *Political analysis.* The portion of the policy analysis that considers the who, what, why, and how behind the policy problem.
- *Problem definition.* The first step in the policy analysis model; the policy analyst verifies the initial statement of the problem, finds the best available data, cuts the problem down to size, defines the problem from the perspective of the interested parties, and conducts the first approximation of the analysis.
- *Problem statement.* A preliminary, written analysis of the policy problem; a policy brief.
- *Traditional information search.* Information in the form of reports, statistical profiles, articles, and books typically housed in libraries, archives, government agencies, professional associations, and electronic data bases.
- *Uncertainty.* The point on a decision tree where the outcome is determined by forces the decision maker does not control and can only estimate; this estimate is usually presented as "probability."

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4

How Will the Best Policy Be Determined?

This chapter will discuss the concept of matching how well a policy alternative meets the policy goals of the decision makers. Although school boards and school administrators strive to meet many different and conflicting goals with the policies they adopt, realistically, four broad categories of decision criteria exist (Patton & Sawicki, 1986): technical feasibility, economic and financial possibility, political viability, and administrative operability. It is often difficult to get those who set school policy to state the explicit criteria they prefer in weighing different alternatives. In many cases, the policy analyst helps policymakers to recognize formally the factors that do and will influence their final decisions.

MacRae and Wilde (1979) identify three standards for evaluating decision criteria. They are *clarity, consistency,* and *generalizability.* Decision criteria need to be clear, so they can be quantified or implemented and applied to all possible alternatives. They need to be consistent, so they can be used with the variety of conflicting values found in the public school settings. They need to be general, so they can be used to compare all types of policy alternatives. Of course, decision criteria can change as the original policy issue evolves during the process of defining and verifying the problem. The policy analysis process is iterative. Criteria identified early in the process may be modified later as more is learned and the relative importance of each decision criterion changes.

This chapter has five sections. The first section explains technical feasibility criteria, including effectiveness and adequacy. The second section describes economic and financial criteria and provides several analytical methods to measure these decision criteria. The third section presents five political viability criteria. The next section explains five criteria that determine how administratively operable policy alternatives are. The chapter closes with a discussion of how to determine what decision criteria are important to policymakers.

4.1 Technical Feasibility

Technical feasibility criteria measure whether policy or program outcomes achieve their purpose. That is, they address basic questions of whether the alternatives will work in a technical sense. Will a high school dropout prevention program really affect the number of students who leave school without diplomas? Should a district lease or purchase buses for its transportation needs? Will parents support a new sex education curriculum? Although technical feasibility seems to be a straightforward matter, it is very unpredictable and complex to determine. When dealing with human behavior, no policy or program will always bring about its intended effect.

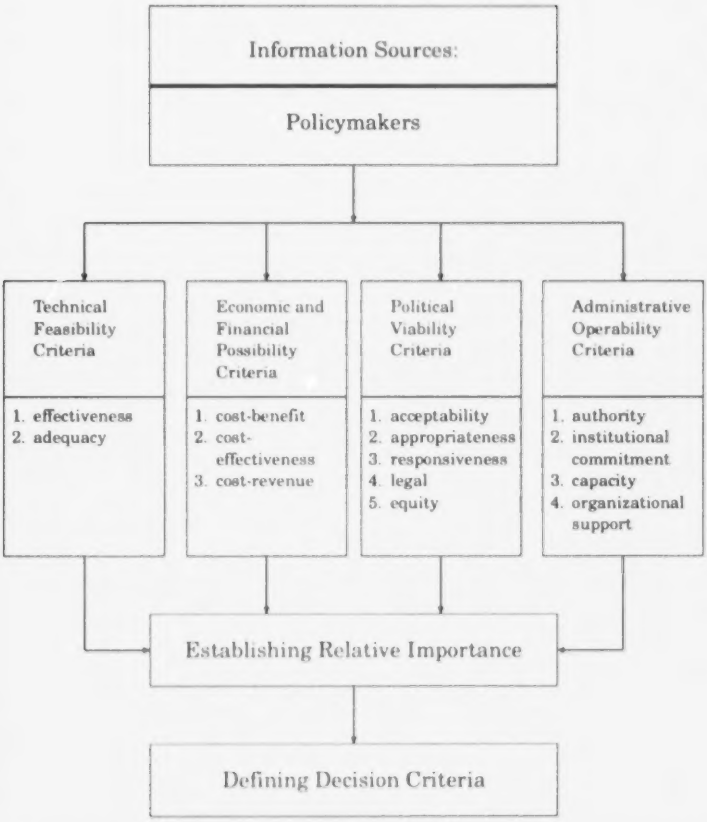

Figure 4.1. Step 2 of the CASA Model: Defining Policy Decision Criteria

There are two principal criteria within this category: effectiveness and adequacy. The criterion of *effectiveness* focuses on whether the proposed policy will have its intended effect. The quickest way to estimate effect is to find how the proposed policy or program worked in other places. The context within which programs or policies are implemented can vary, however, and this will have important consequences for program outcomes.

We learned from the research and evaluation of Great Society model programs developed by the federal government in the 1960s that what succeeds in one school may not work at all in another school. Several dimensions within the effectiveness criterion relate to policy effects: Are the effects direct or indirect, long-term or short-term, and quantifiable or not?

The adequacy criterion measures how far toward a solution a policy or program can proceed with the resources available. For example, even though we know the effectiveness of Head Start, the majority of 4-year-olds who are eligible do not have access to this program. Even an effective program can fall short of all its objectives or solve only part of the larger problem, particularly if implementation requires sustained and substantial public expenditures.

4.2 Economic and Financial Possibility

Economic and financial criteria measure two outcomes: the cost of policies or programs and the benefits of policies or programs. Like effectiveness criteria, the costs and benefits of financial criteria are direct or indirect, short- or long-term, and quantifiable or not. These criteria have fiscal implications for school decision makers; that is, impacts experienced as gains or losses for teachers and administrators and other school employees are experienced as revenue or debt for the public, primarily taxpayers. Policies also can have mostly economic implications for decision makers; that is, they can have impacts on the economy of the community in which the district or school resides. Most policy issues in public education have both fiscal and economic impacts. Even if the decision makers state that the only criterion they will use is "the bottom line," the policy analyst needs to include some measure of the other decision criteria in the policy analysis process. This is necessary because the other three categories of decision criteria target various community values.

The major reason the discipline of economics has dominated in policy analysis is that it deals with measurable constructs. Analysts and decision makers alike prefer "hard" analysis and

information that can be communicated in quantitative terms such as in dollars and tax millage. Three concepts are prominent in any discussion of economic decision criteria: tangible versus intangible measures, monetarizable versus nonmonetarizable measures, and direct versus indirect cost-benefit measures. A tangible cost or benefit is something that can be counted, such as the number of students served by a program or the hours per week buses are on the road. An intangible cost or benefit is some outcome that is socially or politically valued, which may have been lost, such as community pride in the schools or the quality of the work force in the next century. Monetarizable costs and benefits are tangible measures that can be counted in dollar terms, such as the cost of salaries for reading aides in all first-grade classrooms. The question of whether benefits are direct or indirect can be answered by determining legislative intent: What did decision makers have in mind when they mandated a new program? A brief description of methods that measure these concepts follows.

Cost-benefit analysis is a tool for measuring the relative efficiency of a range of alternatives. In this context, efficiency is measured in dollars (costs) per unit of output (benefits). A simple example is the measurement of the efficiency of two reading programs such as phonics instruction and a whole language program. A predetermined score on a standardized test for each student enrolled in each instructional program could be a measure of output. Thus cost-benefit analysis can tell decision makers which programs provide what outcomes for a specific unit of cost. In addition, policy alternatives that have different goals can be compared with one another.

Cost-effectiveness analysis is a tool for finding the program alternative that accomplishes the specified goal of a policy at the lowest cost. It differs from cost-benefit analysis because the alternatives being compared must share the same policy goal. Of course, this assumes that all policy alternatives being measured can be readily determined to meet or fail to meet the stated policy or program goal. Unlike the concept of efficiency, effectiveness measures are dichotomous. The alternative either will achieve the goal or it will not.

Cost-revenue analysis is a tool for evaluating the profitability of a proposed action. Only monetarized revenues and costs to the district or school undertaking the action are considered. An example of how this method of analysis might be useful would be to determine the costs and benefits of continuing to operate a district's bus transportation system versus privatizing the operation of the system. Cost-revenue analysis is also called "fiscal impact analysis."

These three examples of economic and fiscal criteria measures do not exhaust the list of decision criteria drawn from economics. They do, however, constitute the most common criteria employed to judge the efficacy of public school policies. The school administrator who is acting as the policy analyst and who lacks experience in using these methods should enlist the aid of the district's financial administrator as a member of the analysis team. General-purpose or specialized spreadsheets for microcomputers are invaluable tools for conducting economic and fiscal analyses. Soliciting the assistance of the business community to assist with this kind of analysis is also possible.

4.3 Political Viability

Political viability criteria measure policy or program outcomes in terms of impact on relevant power groups such as the members of the school board, administrators, teacher unions, citizen coalitions, neighborhood groups, and other political alliances. These criteria affect the other three types of criteria. The central issue is whether one or more alternatives will be acceptable or can be made acceptable to the relevant groups within a community. Measurements in this category are usually subjective and much less quantifiable than those of the previous types of criteria. Political insight, understanding of organizational and administrative preferences, and knowledge of the motivations of policy actors enable these criteria to be used by policy analysts. So novice policy analysts need to solicit information and opinions from those who have experience in the district.

Education policy is developed in the political arena and must survive a political test. If a policy will not be supported by school boards or teachers or voters, then the policy has little chance of being adopted. If adopted, the impact of such a policy will be questionable. Consequently, political criteria are important to the viability of the entire policy analysis process.

There are five political decision criteria typically considered in analyzing policy issues and alternatives. *Acceptability* refers both to the determination of whether a policy is acceptable to actors in the political process and to the determination of whether decision makers are open to new policy options. *Appropriateness* measures whether policy goals mesh with the values of the community. *Responsiveness* measures the perceptions of relevant groups as to whether the policy or program meets its needs. *Legal* criteria are political criteria because laws can be changed through political action. At the outset of the policy analysis, the analyst investigates existing laws, rules, and regulations that may affect the design of alternatives with the understanding that laws and rules can be changed. *Equity* as a political criterion arises when the differential impact of a policy change is important. Policy changes seldom affect all parties equally.

The political viability criteria must be clearly identified before determining and evaluating alternatives so policy alternatives can reflect important political factors. Without this consideration, the final decision choice is unlikely to succeed. Although it is important to use numbers to prove one's points, it is also important that systematic analysis of qualitative information be part of this step.

4.4 Administrative Operability

Administrative operability criteria measure how possible it is actually to implement the proposed policy or program within the political, social, and administrative context. Many questions relate to this group of criteria: Is the staffing available? Will

teachers be prepared to implement the program? Does the school have the physical facilities necessary? Can the change be done on time to open school in autumn?

If a technically feasible, economically possible, and politically viable policy cannot be implemented, then the superiority of the policy alternative is in question. Decision makers and policy analysts must ask themselves: Can the existing administrative system deliver the policy or program? How much control does the policymaking body have over the administrative structure? What other groups must be involved? Can bottlenecks and opposition be avoided? All too often, policymakers assume that, if they can design a new program or policy, someone can implement and manage it. Many public policies are adopted with absolutely no knowledge of the particular action that will be necessary to implement them. The responsibility for authentic policymaking is shifted onto the shoulders of the administrators, who may follow the path of least resistance.

There are five specific criteria to consider in evaluating administrative operability. *Authority* to implement the policy—to turn it into a program—is often a critical criterion. Does the implementing group, for example, the central office supervisory staff, have clear authority to make the necessary changes and determine the priorities? *Institutional commitment* from all levels of the hierarchy is important. Not only top administrators but central office and building-level staff must be committed to policy implementation. Most policies require change in staff behavior and, without institutional commitment, the many small actions necessary to implement a policy may not be undertaken. *Capacity,* both staff and financial, is essential to policy implementation. Can the implementing organization do what is being asked? Are the technical skills available? This criterion is essential for identifying both what is possible under existing conditions and what changes are needed to facilitate implementation. *Organizational support* is also an important criterion because it is not sufficient only to have the authority to implement a policy and the commitment of key personnel. It is also necessary to have sufficient equipment, physical facilities, and other support

services. Will they be available? If not currently available, will they be ready by the time a policy option is adopted?

4.5 The Process of Establishing Decision Criteria

Clearly, it is not sufficient for the policy analyst alone to develop a list of criteria and determine their relative merits. These deliberations must be carried out in concert with groups and individuals—school boards, administrators, teachers, community members—involved in the policymaking process. Several technical methods for dealing with multiple and conflicting criteria have been described in this chapter. Before using these methods, however, the policy analyst must establish the general categories. The role of the analyst is to assist decision makers, such as boards of education, to clarify what is sought and to define goals and objectives so that alternatives can be designed. If goals and objectives have not been specified clearly, proposed alternatives will be inappropriate and the final policy choice will not solve the real problem.

Key Terms

- *Administrative operability.* Decision criteria that measure how possible a policy alternative will be to implement.
- *Cost-benefit analysis.* A tool for measuring economic and financial possibility criteria, measuring the relative efficiency of a range of alternatives.
- *Cost-effectiveness analysis.* A tool for measuring economic and financial possibility criteria that finds the alternative that accomplishes the specified goal at the lowest cost.
- *Cost-revenue analysis.* A tool for measuring economic and financial possibility criteria that evaluates the profitability of a proposed action; only monetarized revenues and costs are considered; also called "fiscal impact analysis."
- *Criteria.* Specific statements, rules, or standards about the dimensions of the objectives that will be used to evaluate policy alternatives and make a decision.

- *Economic and financial possibility.* Decision criteria that measure the cost of a policy alternative and the value of the benefits it will produce.
- *Economic efficiency.* A decision criterion that maximizes benefits for the use of a given amount of resources (costs).
- *Effectiveness.* A decision criterion that measures whether the policy or program has its intended effect.
- *Goals.* Formal and broad statements about an organization's desires for the public good in the long run.
- *Objectives.* More focused and concrete statements than goals that usually specify outcomes, targeted groups, and time lines.
- *Political viability.* Decision criteria that measure whether the alternative is acceptable or can be made acceptable to relevant groups.
- *Technical feasibility.* Decision criteria that measure whether the alternative will actually produce the desired result.

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5

What Are the Policy Choices?

Clear and simple policy analysis revolves around making choices. Although school policymakers want similar outcomes, they do support using different means to obtain them. Decision criteria measure the extent to which competing policies achieve an agreed-upon goal, and they help policymakers to select a preferred alternative from among those under consideration. Because an alternative cannot be selected if it is not in the set of options being considered, and because generating alternatives is a creative challenge, many analyses derail at this step in the CASA model.

Potential alternatives may be constrained prematurely because they appear politically unacceptable, too expensive, or so novel

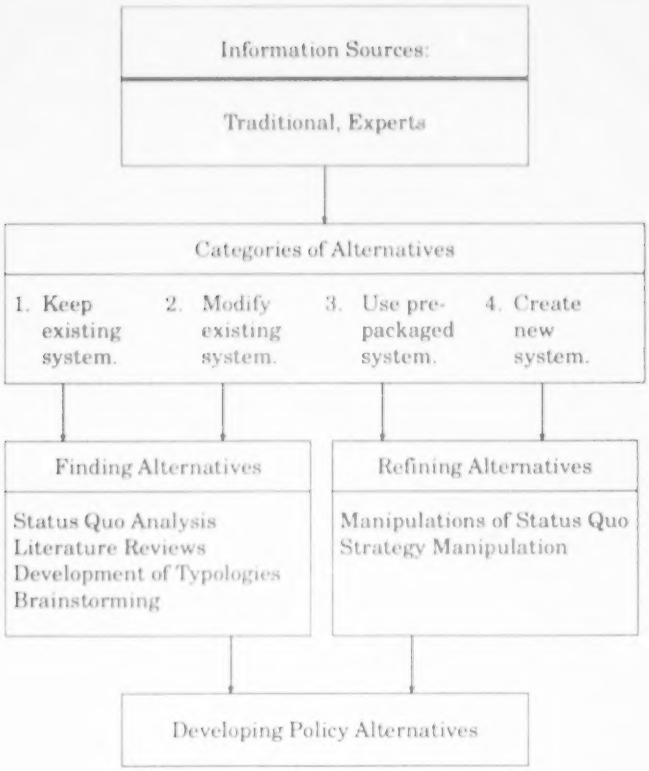

Figure 5.1. Step 3 of the CASA Model: Developing Policy Alternatives

that no one believes they will be accepted. The ideal rational decision maker considers all possible options. This is seldom feasible in the real world of policymaking, even in extensively researched analyses. Instead, analysts seek to generate enough alternatives so there will be a choice among several good ones. They try not to evaluate marginal alternatives in detail. The challenge of developing alternatives is that unlikely options can sometimes succeed because they encounter less political opposition, have lower benefits but dramatically lower costs than

other options, or make use of new technology. So the policy analyst needs to create as many alternatives as possible and to eliminate the unpromising ones in a systematic way.

A common error in developing alternatives is creating solutions that do not squarely address the problem. This may occur because the problem is imperfectly or incompletely defined, the objectives have not been clearly identified, or the analyst has a bias toward a particular solution. It may even result from methodological sloppiness. Whatever the reason, if any alternatives analyzed do not truly address the problem, then the analysis process is a wasted exercise.

Policymakers need to consider real alternatives, not merely weak options that are included simply to impress the decision makers. The value of considering many realistic options is illustrated in the following example. A study of physicians diagnosing a difficult illness showed that the physician who considered the most possible alternatives, who postponed judgment until enough facts were accumulated, and who did not dismiss negative evidence made more correct diagnoses than those who did not consider many options (Brightman, 1980). On the other hand, the number of alternatives that can be seriously considered is limited. Policymakers are capable of evaluating between four and seven alternatives at the same time.

MacRae and Wilde (1979) argue that a wide variety of alternatives should be considered initially, so that the analyst is less likely to overlook important options. This means that more options will be available when policymakers must compromise, and policy recommendations are made politically feasible. The range of options to consider should include options with only incremental changes from the status quo *and* options that appear radically different—even unacceptable. This will help to obtain an idea of what may be possible under changed circumstances.

This chapter presents several methods to identify alternative policies. In the first section, general sources of alternatives are discussed. Then specific, quickly applied methods of identifying policy options and modifying existing solutions are presented.

The third section discusses activities that create rather than find options. The chapter concludes by identifying the common mistakes made in the process of developing policy alternatives.

5.1 Sources of Alternatives

Where does the policy analyst obtain alternatives? How are they generated, discovered, or created? First of all, keeping the status quo should always be considered as an alternative. Additional policy alternatives can be obtained from the experience of other schools with similar problems, from the experience or insight of experts, from the bottom-line requirements of those in authority, from the belief system of policymakers and others in the school community, from legal prescriptions, from technical knowledge, and so on.

Athey (1982) argues that all substantive alternatives can be categorized as one of four options:

(1) Keep the existing system. The existing system is analyzed as a bench mark. This is a way to gain new understanding about the policy issue or problem, to uncover clues about new alternatives, and to know how to respond to defenders of the existing system.

(2) Modify the existing system. Incremental changes in the existing system are always viable policy options. Simple policy alternatives such as instituting formative feedback procedures can solve some policy dilemmas.

(3) Use a prepackaged design. Prepackaged designs include buying an existing solution from another district, using the solutions of others as a starting point, or seeking advice from experts.

(4) Create a new system design. New system designs include idealized designs, parallel situations, and structural approaches. The *idealized approach* begins by assuming no restrictions. Constraints are added to see how much each lowers the effective-

ness of the ideal. For example, if schools were free of governmental regulations, how would student achievement be improved? The *parallel solution approach* involves searching other fields such as business for analogies that suggest solutions. For example, what do businesses do when recessionary forces limit cash flows and how can this knowledge help schools? The *structural approach* involves identifying basic subsystems in determining possible recombinations of the basic components. For example, what plan for the restructuring of schools would affect the teaching-learning process the most?

In his book on problem solving, Brightman (1980) suggests several methods of searching for alternatives. These include the *passive approach,* in which the policy analyst waits for alternatives to be proposed by others; the *search-generation approach,* in which the policy analyst lets others know about the search for alternatives; the *neighborhood approach,* in which the policy analyst examines incremental changes; the *historical approach,* in which the policy analyst searches for solutions to similar problems in earlier times; and the *divergent approach,* in which the policy analyst searches for alternatives that are different from anything tried before. Brightman notes two preconditions restricting the search for alternatives. The first precondition is the definition of the problem and the other precondition is the disciplinary bias of the analyst that comes from his or her academic training. These two preconditions support one of the practicing principles identified in Chapter 1: If all the analyst has is a hammer, then all problems begin to look like nails.

For the novice analyst, the development of policy alternatives will be more successful using a two-step process suggested by Patton and Sawicki (1986). First, the analyst should identify a wide range of possible alternatives. Then, having identified specific options, categories of options, and possible ways of modifying the status quo, the analyst refines, modifies, alters, adapts, and otherwise reconstructs alternatives that will respond to the nuances of the specific policy problem being analyzed. The first

step is basically a search process. The second step requires creative manipulation.

5.2 Finding Policy Alternatives

In addition to the general approaches described above, there are several specific methods for identifying potential alternatives. The purpose of the clear and simple analysis model is to identify alternatives quickly, and this requires specific approaches. *Status quo analysis* investigates the current situation to see whether time might resolve the problem and to provide baseline data against which to measure policy alternatives. *Literature reviews* can reveal successful options used elsewhere. *Development of typologies* groups problems by category to find parallels. *Brainstorming* involves various techniques to help ferret out ideas and options that are not obvious.

A. *Status Quo Analysis*

Policy analyses are undertaken because some authority, the school board or the superintendent, has perceived that a problem exists. The operating assumption made by those in authority is that an alternative policy or action can lessen or eliminate the problem. To decide which alternative to adopt, an evaluation is conducted to estimate how effective various alternatives might be in changing the status quo. The policy analyst wants to know what the situation might be like with immediate action and what it would be like without the action. To be able to make such a judgment, the policy analyst has to invest as much time in analyzing this no-action alternative as in analyzing the action alternatives.

Developing detailed no-action or status quo alternatives and forecasting their results provides a bench mark against which the results of all other alternatives can be measured. In practice, unfortunately, little time is usually spent on serious analysis of the status quo. Rather, the no-action alternative is

described simply as the obviously unacceptable status quo—an option so weak that almost any action will appear more acceptable.

The creation of a useful baseline alternative is a compelling reason to develop a no-action analysis, but there are other reasons as well. First, potential budget reductions and budget reallocations call for careful analysis of the alternative of doing nothing. Second, status quo analysis can help clarify project objectives. Third, it can underline the need (or lack of need) for action. Finally, accepting the possibility that the status quo could be the best solution acknowledges the difficulties inherent in problem definition and the possibility that the problem does not have a real solution.

The status quo alternative rarely involves doing absolutely nothing. Thus it is seldom true that the status quo alternative has no direct costs. Policy analyses in the field of transportation planning have developed the best articulated concept of the status quo: *minimum maintenance*. In the transportation field, status quo alternatives have two restrictions: They cannot increase traffic capacity or upgrade service and they must include the continuation of existing transportation policies such as reasonable maintenance (Lane, Grenzeback, Martin, & Lockwood, 1979). This concept of minimum maintenance acknowledges that "doing nothing" is without neither actions nor costs.

B. *Literature and Expert Review*

Never overlook traditional literature resources as a source of alternatives. Books and journals in the field of school policymaking, planning, and policy analysis may contain cases that will illuminate the search for alternatives. The literature in the substantive fields in which the problem is located (e.g., discipline, staff development, curriculum) also should be examined as the source of alternatives, both successes and failures, and proposed policies that may not have been tried elsewhere. Remember that documents lead to people and people lead to documents. Refer back to Chapter 2 for sources of both traditional and expert information.

TABLE 5.1. Typology of Discipline Alternatives

Discipline Infractions	*Possible Causes*		
	Individual	*Family*	*School*
Use of alcohol	Alcoholism Peer pressure	Lack of parental support No adult supervision	Inconsistent enforcement Ineffective counseling
Chronic tardiness	Job related Family related Failing courses	No adult supervision Cultural differences	Unclear authority Lack of open communication with home
Truancy	Health related Working late Not motivated to arrive on time	No adult supervision Little home support for school	Selective enforcement Unclear expectations Few consequences

c. Development of Typologies

If problems can be grouped into types, parallels become clearer. Thinking about the types of individuals, groups, or organizations affected by potential policy problems can help identify alternatives. For example, possible alternative ways of resolving discipline policies (e.g., truancy, tardiness, smoking) can be identified by developing a typology of discipline infractions and then conceptualizing alternatives to respond to their various causes. Table 5.1 illustrates this alternative-generating strategy. Developing typologies is essentially a list-making approach where the analyst first identifies effective groups, then identifies their probable reactions to each alternative, and then develops specific means of making promising alternatives acceptable to the various groups. If the analyst has completed a political analysis in Step 1, the information about various groups and their motivations will be very helpful in developing a typology of alternatives.

D. *Brainstorming*

Brainstorming can be used to conceptualize possible solutions to a problem. Almost 30 years ago, Osborn (1963) developed the brainstorming technique as a way to generate ideas. The modern brainstorming session is a creative conference for producing a checklist of ideas leading to a problem solution. Brainstorming ranges from informal, quick meetings among staff members working on a problem to more structured meetings with staff, experts, consultants, and even policymakers in attendance.

The term *brainstorm* is often used very loosely to refer to any group discussion of a problem where possible solutions are generated. A brainstorming group might come together on the spur of the moment, composed of individuals assigned to work on the problem plus others who are assumed to have some insight into the problem.

Within the CASA model, however, Osborn's technique is more formalized, with individuals participating on the basis of their demonstrated expertise in the problem area. The meeting process should be more structured: Ideas are developed in a phase 1 brainstorming session where criticism and evaluation are kept to a minimum, and then ideas are evaluated in a follow-up session. Possible problem solutions are then ranked and packaged into a problem solution packet. Osborn emphasized that a true brainstorming session must follow "the deferment of judgment" principle: That is, ideas should be evaluated after the idea generation phase so as not to throw cold water on good ideas or to shut out good ideas because people who would offer them feel they might be criticized.

Osborn (1963, p. 156) developed a set of basic rules to follow for brainstorming sessions:

1. Criticism is ruled out. Adverse judgment of ideas must be withheld until later.
2. Freewheeling is welcome. The wilder the idea, the better; it is easier to tame down than to think up.
3. Quantity is important. The greater the number of ideas, the more likelihood of useful ideas.

4. Combination and improvement are sought. In addition to contributing ideas of their own, participants should suggest how ideas of others can be turned into better ideas or how two or more ideas can be joined into still a third idea.

Other guidelines to remember include working as a single group, not dividing into little groups; keeping a written record of all ideas suggested; encouraging people to contribute ideas even if they think their ideas are worthless; and focusing on a specific problem so that thoughts can be directed.

Even as a proponent of brainstorming, Osborn has recognized that it has drawbacks. He argues that brainstorming should be a supplement to other methods of problem solving. Osborn warned against failing to define the problem accurately, failing to encourage participants when initial ideas were not very good, failing to evaluate and criticize the ideas subsequently, overselling the technique, and failing to follow brainstorming procedures. The extent to which these limitations occur in brainstorming in policy analysis is the extent it could adversely affect policy outcomes.

Individuals and groups using brainstorming have found that groups of 4 to 12 people work best. Ideas produced by brainstorming should be screened at a later session by persons other than those who generated the ideas; the brainstorming group should have a leader, an associate leader, three to five core members, and three to five individuals outside the district or school. The group should comprise peers, because the presence of supervisors often discourages free participation by subordinates.

The leader begins the session by spelling out the charge, calling for suggestions, and keeping the session moving. One idea at a time should be offered, and hitchhike ideas (combination of ideas already offered) should be taken before going on to other ideas to make the best use of the power of association. Ideas should be written on a chalkboard or on chart paper by a recorder and numbered but not associated with individuals. The pace of idea suggestion should be quick. Sessions may be as short as 15 minutes or as long as 45 minutes. A day or two after the session, participants might be contacted to see whether they have useful afterthoughts.

In quick and simple analysis, brainstorming sessions to generate alternatives might include a staff meeting with people from other schools or districts, a session with citizen or parent groups or the school board, or even a session designed to make good use of outside consultants.

5.3 Refining Alternatives to Address Local Problems

After compiling the list of possible alternatives from among the options suggested by others, those used in different locales, or those uncovered through the use of brainstorming, the policy analyst still has to combine alternatives to make them applicable to the local problem and responsive to current policy constraints. Unfortunately, experienced analysts do not provide a great amount of guidance when it comes to refining alternatives—except to tell novice analysts to be creative.

A. *Manipulations of the Status Quo*

Although the analyst may be able to identify a long list of possible alternatives by using the tools discussed in this chapter, many options will need changing to be workable in the local setting. Osborn (1963) spent a great amount of time in his career teaching people how to be more creative. In helping people learn how to solve problems, Osborn devised a number of ways to modify existing solutions to generate new ones. His strategies to create policy options include the following manipulations of the status quo.

Magnify: Make larger, higher, longer. Add resources. Apply more often. Duplicate. Multiply. Exaggerate. Add new components.

Minify: Make smaller, shorter, narrower, lower, lighter. Miniaturize. Omit, remove, split apart. Understate.

Substitute: Switch components. Switch order. Use different materials. Change location. Change the sponsor.

Combine: Blend two approaches. Combine units. Combine purposes. Combine sponsors.
Rearrange: Reverse. Invert. Change sequence. Speed up. Slow down. Randomize. Place in a pattern.

Not only might existing options be made larger or smaller, or be combined, substituted, or rearranged, but they can be placed in a different location, or their timing, financing, or organization might be varied as well. Potential alternatives also might be modified or adapted by reconsidering how they might be implemented. The location of decisions and how risk is handled can be varied to reveal potential alternatives.

Having identified the policy variables to be manipulated and having determined in what way and to what extent the variables can be manipulated, the policy analyst then recombines them into competing alternatives. This is no easy task. The Chinese menu approach is easy to set up but not always effective. "Only through an intricate process of trying a combination of manipulations, assessing that combination, then repackaging in light of the assessment, can one begin to formulate a reasonable set of alternatives" (May, 1981, p. 240). Because analysts are limited in their ability to prepare many strategies, those alternatives that differ on relatively unimportant variables should be eliminated. By repackaging and recombining the policy elements, combinations that are more effective and efficient and that satisfy decision criteria are more likely to be created.

B. *Strategy Manipulation*

May (1981) has proposed a method for refining alternatives that is called "strategy manipulation." This method can be used to address specific local aspects of the policy problem. Alternatives are developed by combining the manipulated variables into coherent strategies. These strategies are then revised as the problem is redefined. For example, the school board members in Happy Valley School District initially believed that inadequate staff development programs resulted in low test scores in math in the fourth and sixth grades. They stated that

TABLE 5.2. Strategy Manipulation: Policy Alternatives for Staff Development

Policy Variables	*Range of Manipulation*		
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Wide*
Range of activities	Determined by district	District and school generated	Activities based on individual needs
Participation requirements	Mandatory participation	Mandatory minimum participation	Choice of days and activities within school calendar
Participation benefits	No credit	Credits if staff conforms to rules	Credit/noncredit option
Scheduling of activities	4 days per year	District and building sites	Flexible
Staffing	Outside experts picked by district	Outside experts picked by staff	Outside experts and district staff

the most important decision criterion they would use to choose the appropriate policy alternative would be the limited amount of money they have to spend.

Table 5.2 displays an analysis of this staff development problem with five critical policy variables identified. If, in the process of developing alternatives, the problem shifts and the decision criteria change, the analyst can move from or to more limited strategies. The range of manipulations is determined by the policy analyst. May's tool of analysis helps the policy analyst determine what variables in a problem can be manipulated. This requires a sense both of what *can* be done and what *should* be done. The effectiveness of this tool is dependent upon the policy analyst's thorough knowledge and understanding of the policy problem and the policymakers.

After the analyst has figured out what variables can be manipulated, and how much each variable can be manipulated, the possible actions can be packaged into sets of competing strategies. May uses the word *strategies* rather than *alternatives* because it captures the sense that competing policies involve manipulations of the same set of policy variables. May (1981, p. 240) notes that, "in forming feasible packages of actions, one must be able to conceptualize how different levels of variables fit together. . . . Typically, different combinations of levels of policy variables must be combined in order to obtain what are acceptable strategies in terms of a number of relevant criteria."

5.4 Common Mistakes to Avoid

This chapter began with a discussion of the importance of generating many alternatives, postponing selection of the preferred alternative, thinking expansively, and conducting a continuous search for alternatives. If the policy analyst mishandles identifying alternatives or defining the problem, he or she is not likely to solve the real problem. To repeat what was said earlier: If good, technically feasible alternatives are not included among the alternatives to be evaluated, or if the problem was defined incorrectly, then the most brilliant, technically superior alternatives are a waste of time. There is no way to guarantee that the real problem has been identified and that appropriate alternatives have been found, but analysts can improve their chances by avoiding some common mistakes.

Listed below are seven common mistakes in attempts to develop alternatives:

1. relying too heavily on past experiences,
2. failing to record ideas or insights as they occur,
3. locking in on a problem definition too soon,
4. forming a preference too early,
5. criticizing ideas as they are offered,
6. ruling out alternatives through preevaluation, and

7. failing to reconsider dismissed alternatives as conditions change.

To avoid these mistakes, the analyst should engage in a systematic, careful search for relevant alternatives, use alternative design methods where possible to generate new alternatives, and be aware that political and bureaucratic processes may act to eliminate relevant, possibly optimal alternatives before they can be formally evaluated. The novice policy analyst should also take action to retain, reenter, and revive alternatives that were dismissed without adequate evaluation earlier in the development of alternatives.

Key Terms

- *Bench mark.* A standard of performance.
- *Brainstorming.* A tool for developing policy alternatives; an example of the idealized approach to problem solving and the divergent approach to searching for policy alternatives; a formal group process technique for generating ideas in which ideas from one person are intended to trigger ideas from another—positive reinforcement is encouraged and criticism is held to a minimum.
- *Development of typologies.* Tool for developing policy alternatives; an example of the structural approach to problem solving; grouping of problems into classes or types so they can be understood—for example, identifying types of bus problems and then conceptualizing alternatives to respond to the various needs.
- *Hitchhike ideas.* The combination of two or more suggestions during a brainstorming session.
- *Literature review.* A tool for developing policy alternatives; an example of the parallel solution approach to problem solving and the historical solution approach to searching for policy alternatives.
- *Manipulations of the status quo.* A tool for developing policy alternatives; an example of the structural approach to problem solving and the neighborhood approach to refining alternatives.
- *Minimum maintenance.* A status quo alternative that demonstrates that even no-action choices have costs and performance expectations.
- *Status quo analysis.* A tool for developing policy alternatives; studying the conditions that would evolve in the absence of an action alternative for the future; this is not the same thing as doing nothing;

the no-action alternative often can be defined as reasonable maintenance of current trends or policies.

- *Strategy manipulations.* A tool for developing policy alternatives; an approach to creating alternatives through the manipulation of variables into coherent strategies.

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6

What Are the Strengths and Weaknesses of Alternative Policies?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe several tools to evaluate policy alternatives, helping policymakers to understand the potential consequences of their possible choices. Evaluation of possible alternatives is more difficult than evaluation of current programs because it involves projecting future states with and without the proposed policy actions. In other words, the policy analyst must help the policymakers understand several possible futures—each based on one of the policy options. This requires projecting the effects of the proposed action. Two problems complicate the task of projection. One problem is that the

Figure 6.1. Step 4 of the CASA Model: Considering Policy Alternatives

research knowledge base is inadequate, especially when it is compared with the wealth of knowledge from postimplementation evaluations. Predictions of future conditions in a district or school environment are tricky. Not only does the analyst need to be concerned about what types of methods are appropriate to use, but the question of *what* to forecast is problematic. As was the case in previous steps in the CASA model, the variables to be forecast depend very much on how the problem is defined.

Another problem in considering different policy alternatives is deciding what to evaluate. An important question to answer is whether a proposed policy will work: Will it meet the desired goals? A second issue is whether the alternative will work in an efficient and equitable manner. The basic methods discussed in this chapter include the forecasting of policy impacts through

techniques including budgetary projections, the Delphi technique, and cost-effectiveness analysis.

A key consideration at this step in clear and simple analysis, or the CASA model, is the relationship between the policy analyst and his or her client: the school board. How far should the analyst go in making critical decisions for the policymaker? Only one policy alternative will be chosen by policymakers. How can the information be presented to clients so that their values are used in evaluating alternative policies? What methods of analysis fit the decision criteria of the policymakers? These and other questions form the conceptual framework of Step 4 in the CASA model.

The first section of this chapter presents three forecasting methods that are appropriate tools to use when financial and economic decision criteria are evaluated. The second section provides details about three qualitative methods for determining the consequences of alternatives and their relationship with the decision criteria. The last section discusses what effect multiple criteria have when considering the strengths and weaknesses of each policy alternative.

6.1 Financial and Economic Analysis: Forecasting Methods

A. *Budgetary Projections*

The widespread availability of the microcomputer has been a boon to policy analysis. For instance, the use of the microcomputer is integral to strategic budget development. From a strategic perspective, budgets constrain policy options, but they should not dictate educational priorities. Rather, educational priorities should dictate the budget. Although it may be desirable for the budget of a district to reflect its priorities, in fact, most educational budgets reflect incremental adjustments of the previous year's budget. To move away from incrementalism requires a budgetary system that links programmatic goals to

the human resources, materials, and facilities required to accomplish them.

The shift of resources to support educational goals can have an unforseen fiscal consequence. In this sense, incrementalism is safe because it is predictable. Fortunately, spreadsheets and microcomputer technology combine to provide a relatively straightforward methodology. Microcomputer technology makes it easier to review systematically both direct and indirect costs of programmatic changes. For example, introducing a new preschool facility for high school students with young children may significantly increase the enrollment of single parents at the school. One consequence of providing child care support services might be to change the character of the student population attending a school and thus change the demand for the kind of courses students will attend. The policy analyst might plan for such contingencies by relating the changing composition of the student body to their course-taking behavior. Changes in course enrollment obviously affect the internal allocation of staff and resources.

One useful method of projecting educational policy alternatives has many applications relative to strategic budgetary analysis, whether attempting to estimate the ripple effect of related programs or the cost of one educational program over a period of years. The true costs of a policy alternative then can be compared with the projected revenue sources available to an educational institution, enabling the policymakers to determine whether the institution can afford to implement the proposed policy or to decide which policy should receive priority. In public schools, revenue sources would come largely from a combination of local and state taxes and federal grants.

A matrix is an important concept that greatly increases the power of spreadsheet application budgeting. A *matrix* can be any combination of rows and columns such that all the cells are filled with some numerical value. For example, the salary schedule in U.S. public education is a matrix. *Ripple effects* come into play when the cost of one policy interacts with the cost of another. For example, assume a district agrees to an 8% across-the-board-increase in teachers' salaries. This means ad-

ditional monies must be spent at all levels of the salary schedule but especially at the senior levels of the scale. Salary matrices are also useful for studying the impact of alternative policies designed to accomplish specific recruiting goals. If, for example, entry-level teacher salaries are too low, one strategy a district might consider is to give percentage increases to junior faculty and a flat amount to the senior faculty. Setting up spreadsheets to aid in evaluating policy alternatives is both an efficient and an effective means to evaluating options.

B. *Delphi Technique*

Sophisticated methodologies have been developed to make intuitive forecasting more accurate, richer in detail, and more legitimate so that it carries some weight in the policy context. The *Delphi technique*, for example, involves relatively strict controls on the methods of interviewing and reinterviewing panelists and summarizing the results. The Delphi technique is a refined form of inductive forecasting. Policy analysts will find this research method effective when time and resources are limited. Several procedures from the Delphi technique can be adapted for use in a quick forecast, which include selecting knowledgeable participants, independence and anonymity of participants in the first stage, reinterviewing and revising of initial forecast with individual participants after disclosure of preliminary results, and developing a consensual forecast.

The choice of knowledgeable individuals to use is an important prerequisite of the Delphi technique. Spending time and effort to find experts pays off in the quality of analysis. If time is limited, use no more than 10 experts. The questionnaire used with the expert panel should be well organized, pointed at the central questions, and consistently administered, probably by one interviewer. Interviewing over the telephone is another means of maximizing resources.

The second procedure requires anonymity. The expert panel should be interviewed independently of one another and each individual's anonymity should be preserved, at least initially. Once the first round of interviewing is complete, results should

be compiled and participants informed of the results, with inconsistencies in the assumptions, data, and logic highlighted. This could be summarized in writing but, if time is short, this information is more likely to be communicated orally.

Next, the experts should comment on the findings and revise their forecasts. This information will be compiled into a second forecast. The intuitive forecasting process should take no more than 20 to 30 hours of time to complete. Although this lacks the rigor of the more researched Delphi process, it applies some important principles from that methodology and accomplishes some of the objectives of formal, intuitive forecasting while remaining quick and basic in nature.

c. Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

The technique of cost-effectiveness analysis also requires the use of a spreadsheet on a microcomputer. Cost-effectiveness strategies estimate the costs and effects of policy alternatives. This tool helps the analyst find alternatives that accomplish a specified goal at the lowest cost. The most significant strength of cost-effectiveness analysis is that it evaluates policies and policy alternatives with their relevant measures of outcomes. That is, cost-effectiveness analysis can measure affirmative action programs in terms of employment rates, computer-assisted instruction in terms of student achievement, and things like energy conservation programs in terms of the energy consumed. These particular measures are especially conducive to replication studies, comparisons over time, and comparisons among alternative policies. In short, cost-effectiveness is an appropriate strategy for an education policy analyst concerned about strategic decision making. Procedures for evaluating the results of cost-effectiveness analysis are presented below.

In cost-effectiveness analysis, the decision-making process involves trade-offs between effectiveness and educational outcomes and costs. An example from Richards (1989) illustrates this point. Table 6.1 presents a cost-effectiveness analysis to help policymakers choose between two policy alternatives: Ad-

TABLE 6.1 Cost-Effectiveness Analysis for Two Mathematics Programs

Policy Alternative	*Cost per Student*	*Average Mastery Test Score*	*Cost Per Mastery Point*
Program A (math tutors)	$250.00	72	$2.94
Program B (math tutorial)	$200.00	67	$2.67

SOURCE: From C. E. Richards, *Microcomputer Applications for Strategic Management in Education* (1989, New York: Longman, p. 66).

ministrators must make a decision between two math programs. Program A involves using peer tutors from an advanced mathematics course. Program B requires scheduling time in a microcomputer lab and purchasing 25 copies of the software tutorial that has been recommended by education experts.

Program A costs $250 per student for five hours of tutoring per week for 10 weeks. Program B costs $150 to lease the software for 10 weeks, and $50 to provide supervision in the microcomputer lab, for a total of $200 per student. Each program has been piloted with 100 students. A mastery exam (for which 100 equals a perfect score) is given at the end of 10 weeks. The cost for each point of mastery in Program A is $2.94. For Program B, it is $2.67. Program B is less expensive, and Program A is more effective.

If the goal of the educational policymakers is to have every student attain a mastery level of 70%, then Program B is the better choice. If mastery is defined as 80%, however, then policymakers must decide whether the benefits outweigh the higher cost of Program A or whether some other policy alternative is more desirable.

As this example demonstrates, cost-effectiveness analysis does not solve policy problems for administrators; it does, however, provide a consistent basis for making reasoned decisions about trade-offs between cost and effectiveness.

One can see that obtaining a ratio of cost to effectiveness requires two elements: a measure of cost and one or more measures of desired outcome. Obviously, not all projects or policy options meet this requirement. For example, the policy analyst might be able to estimate cost but not be able to estimate a meaningful outcome. Cost-effectiveness analysis would be a poor technique to measure the impact of an ethics course on the values of high school students.

A number of projects and programs, however, do lend themselves to analysis with cost-effectiveness methods. First, the policy analyst must answer two questions:

1. How can a reasonable estimate of cost be determined?
2. What is a reasonable estimate of outcome?

If these two questions have answers, a cost-effectiveness analysis is possible. It still may not be feasible, however. Three additional questions are pertinent:

1. Can the cost-effectiveness analysis be conducted at a reasonable expense to the organization?
2. Can it be conducted within the available time frame of the policy decision?
3. Is there a policy audience available who potentially can be influenced by the findings of a cost-effectiveness analysis?

Together these five questions will determine whether you should undertake the cost-effectiveness analysis to help you choose which policy alternative to recommend.

6.2 Qualitative Comparisons of Policy Alternatives

As was shown in Chapter 4, decision makers use several criteria to choose among the policy alternatives provided. Although economic and financial criteria are the most often cited standards for choosing an alternative, the other three standards are

relevant to this discussion of policy options to consider. This section describes two tools for qualitative analysis of policy alternatives: scenario writing and political analysis.

A. *Scenario Writing*

Scenario writing is a technique that may be used both in the process of evaluating alternatives and as a means for presenting the results of policy analysis. Scripts are written to analyze what the likely results would be if various alternatives were adopted. The analyst writes scenarios for personal use or for the use of the client as an aid in thinking about the pros and cons of various alternatives. Usually scenarios focus on the political, technical, and administrative criteria of the analysis process, but more generally they can be used to describe future states of the specific school or district environment in which one or more alternatives are being implemented.

If technical feasibility is the primary decision criterion, the information gathered in the previous steps of CASA helps shape the various scenarios. For example, Yellow Springs School District is revising its K-12 health curriculum and several groups have asked for a more proactive sex education component. The school board has stated that it will judge all alternatives against the standard of their instructional effectiveness. Because the nature of this policy issue is driven by political and ethical considerations as well as the instructional aspect, writing radically different scenarios to predict future outcomes for the various sex education options is particularly useful.

Scenario writing includes the following procedures. First, the analyst summarizes the general policy issues, setting the stage for the alternatives being analyzed. For Yellow Springs, this means describing the specific process of curriculum development in the district. Alternative curricular programs are then described in detail and the intended outcomes of each choice are discussed. Each scenario includes answers to questions such as these: What are the long-term effects anticipated by including sex education in the curriculum? How can the outcomes be measured?

Once these questions have been answered, the scenarios should be written. Usually the optimistic scenario is written first.

The optimistic scenario describes for the policymakers the process and decision points necessary to adopt a policy alternative with few compromises to the current situation. The optimistic scenario spells out such issues as the motivations, beliefs, and resources of all groups and individuals who have a stake in the policy problem; describes the relationships between the alternative and the policy issue; and predicts an intended outcome under normal circumstances.

The worst-case scenario describes for the policymakers all the things that could go wrong during the analytical process. The purpose of writing a worst-case scenario is to identify the warning signals of potential danger, so the policymakers can change or modify their decisions before a policy catastrophe occurs. In the case of Yellow Springs's sex education program, catastrophes have a much higher probably of occurring. If strong opposition forms or the time frame for implementation is shortened, policymakers will find the worst-case or bail-out scenario very useful.

At least one other scenario should be developed so policymakers have at least three versions of the policy issues and alternatives to help them understand the choices and their implications for future directions.

B. *Political Analysis*

During Step 1 of the CASA process, the analyst will have determined both the technical and the political goals and objectives of the policymakers and will have determined whether the problem is technical, political, or both. Analysts also should determine the nature of the political context. For example, is the policy problem widely recognized by all stakeholders? Will the analyst have to develop a plan to cause the public to understand the problem? By Step 4 of CASA, however, the analyst should have a more comprehensive understanding of the political terrain. As policy alternatives are developed, compared, and contrasted, political analysis again becomes a useful tool.

Meltsner (1972) outlines a process of political analysis that analyzes the policy alternatives on the basis of five factors: What *actors* are involved with each alternative under consideration? What are their *beliefs and motivations*? What *resources* do they hold to effect a decision to support a specific alternative? How *effective* are the actors in using their resources? Where are the *decision-making sites* for choosing the policy alternative? This type of political analysis is much more comprehensive than the political analysis conducted in the problem identification step. The analyst needs more to time to experience the policy process to answer these questions. Some of the information will have been gathered during previous steps, but detailed and complicated answers will take more research.

Listed below are each of the five factors with suggestions for the information necessary to understand the political dynamics surrounding policy alternatives.

Actors

1. For each alternative, identify all the individuals and groups who are concerned about the policy problem and who will support or oppose the alternative.
2. For each alternative, identify all individuals or groups not likely to be involved in decision making but who might be affected by the alternative.

Beliefs and Motivations

1. What does each actor believe about the policy problem and possible solutions?
2. What does each actor want; that is, what are the goals and objectives of the actor?
3. What are the nonnegotiable options of each actor?

Resources

1. What power, influence, or authority to control events or affect others' behavior does each actor have?

2. What financial resources to support analysis and communication does each actor have?

Effectiveness

1. How likely is an actor to mobilize and use his or her resources?
2. Which actors are most able and most likely to get what they want?

Decision Sites

1. By whom and in what organizations will decisions be made?
2. What are the sequences of the decision making?
3. What are the informal decision sites?
4. Who or where are the possible veto sites?
5. What actors are gatekeepers at more than one decision site?

Answers to these questions will provide a more thorough understanding of what is politically viable in a given situation. If the policymakers have identified political viability as an important decision criterion, this process of political analysis is necessary. Political analysis by itself, however, is *not* enough. Using other tools of analysis to determine the technical, economic, and administrative qualities of policy alternatives is required. This discussion of political analysis has assumed that the policymakers seek political advice from the analyst. If this is not true, the analyst may want to conduct such an analysis anyway as a strategy for Step 5 in the CASA model.

6.3 Multiple-Criteria Analysis

An important message in this chapter is the notion that quantitative analysis alone is not sufficient for an analysis of policy alternatives. Quantitative analysis can result in conflicting con-

clusions that must be compared with one another in a consistent, logical way to make politically viable choices. Technical and economic analyses do not speak for themselves. By this point in the book, I hope the reader has developed a healthy skepticism about the possibility of identifying a single, correct policy that is acceptable to all the respective groups and individuals involved. Seldom is this possible because groups, individuals, analysts, and decision makers have conflicting objectives and values.

One purpose of the CASA process is to identify the options that can most efficiently and effectively resolve a problem, that are politically viable, and that can be implemented. It is obvious that in some situations the superior technical solution is a politically unacceptable option to implement and is not the best policy. The policy analysis process, then, must include a step that integrates both technical and political considerations, that recognizes and deals with the problems of multiple criteria, and that relates quantitative and qualitative data to the policy problems and decision criteria.

A. *Matrix Displays*

As policy analysts present their analyses to policymakers, their primary concern is to show visually how multiple criteria compare in the plus and minus column without summarizing all data into one large measurement. A checklist or matrix approach has been used to indicate the extent to which alternatives satisfy criteria. Along one axis of the matrix, the alternatives are listed. Along the other axis, the decision criteria are included. An implied assumption is that all criteria are equal. One way to eliminate this shortcoming is to weigh each criterion by some ranking determined within the community. Although this is not always satisfactory, the matrix does provide a clear display of the various policy alternatives.

Figure 6.2 illustrates the usefulness of a matrix in comparing three policy alternatives with both qualitative and quantitative information. The example comes from the complex problem of determining early-retirement options. Policymakers can then make their choice based on several decision criteria.

Selected Criteria	*Group-Based Annuity*	*Individual-Based Annuity*	*Partial Employment-Individual Annuity*
Funds freed	$9,076	$10,343	$7,927
Employee replacement rate	0.61	0.69	0.53
Retirement income level	$24,380	$27,784	$30,200
Administrative feasibility	Benefit schedule encourages lower-valued persons to retire	Problems estimating number of voluntary retirements	Reemployment may be cumbersome
Legal feasibility	Precedent exists	Precedent exists	Precedent exists
Political feasibility	Lower paid given larger benefits	Individuals concerned about reemployment	Employee remains on payroll

Key: Best Intermediate Worst

Figure 6.2. Displaying Policy Alternatives with a Matrix: Selected Early-Retirement Options[a]
SOURCE: Patton & Sawicki, 1986, p. 277.
a. These options are for an average-salaried employee aged 60 with 30 years service.

Key Terms

- *Budgetary projections.* A forecasting tool based on strategic planning instead of incrementalism.
- *Cost-effectiveness analysis.* A forecasting tool for finding the alternative that accomplishes the specified goal at the lowest cost.
- *Delphi technique.* A forecasting tool and refined form of inductive forecasting; a modified version is applicable in clear and simple analysis.
- *Inductive forecasting.* A set of tools or methods in which the future state is predicted and then data and assumptions necessary to achieve the outcome are deduced.
- *Intuitive forecasting.* A method of predicting the future based on researched insight or perception.
- *Matrix.* An organizing device that gives form or origin to a complex set of factors and sorts variables in a policy analysis of alternatives.
- *Political analysis.* A qualitative analysis tool for sorting political actors who will affect a policy choice.
- *Ripple effect.* The interaction between one variable and other variables that can produce unintended consequences of policy choices.
- *Scenario writing.* A qualitative method useful for both evaluating alternatives and presenting the results; scenarios are scripts of what might happen under different alternatives.

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7

Presenting the Policy Choices

Before describing Step 5 in the CASA model, a word of caution: There is no one best policy for solving any problem. So the use of local school policy analysis is less a search for the right answer than a process to increase the likelihood that school goals will be achieved without hurting any specific group in the school. Policy choices will not please or benefit everyone, but they should not harm any group of students.

The clear and simple analysis of school-related problems is not a panacea to resolve all conflicts. As the previous chapters have shown, policymaking is often a compromise between availability of resources and political expediencies or between technical feasibility and administrative capabilities. The CASA

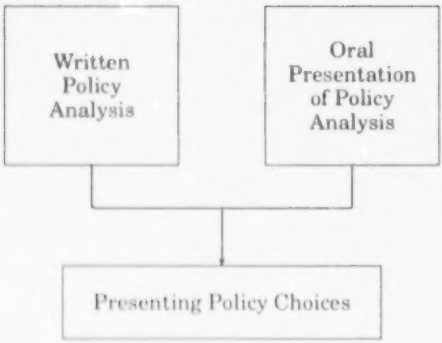

Figure 7.1. Step 5 of the CASA Model: Presenting the Policy Choices

model is a reasonable alternative to seat-of-the-pants decision making. But it does not ensure that all policies will work. The CASA model is iterative because, even when a policy choice has achieved its intended goals, new relationships and circumstances create new problems for school administrators.

This chapter has two sections. The first presents a format for presenting the results of the policy analysis to decision makers. The second section offers some suggestions for the oral presentation of the policy analysis.

7.1 Writing up the Policy Analysis

How do you know when it is time to stop the policy analysis process and present your results? There are three guidelines you can use to answer this question. When you can predict what your information source will tell you, you need to redirect your focus. If you have already redirected your search once or twice, however, then you probably have covered your subject well. A second guideline is when you have put in much time and effort but little new information is arriving. This point of diminishing returns usually signals it is time to stop. The third guideline is

obvious: When you have run out of time and your deadline is up, you have no choice but to stop.

In most school-related situations, the typical format for presenting a policy analysis is a written report that is orally presented to the decision-making body. What follows is a summary of the salient elements of the written policy analysis report.

There are seven basic elements of a written policy analysis report: executive summary, introduction, problem statement, policy alternatives, comparison of the alternatives, implementation strategies, and evaluation. This discussion is intended to be a guide to those who are inexperienced at policy analysis. If you have a format that you have used successfully in the past, by all means follow it.

A. *Executive Summary*

This is a one-page summary of the policy issues, the policy options, and means of comparing the options. More policy reports would be read by decision makers if brief summaries of the problems and proposals were provided.

B. *Introduction*

This part of the report sets the context of the analysis. It tells the reader what problem has been studied, how the report is organized, and what options will be presented.

C. *Problem Statement*

The statement of the problem categorizes the nature of the problems presented. The categories are usually the decision criteria: organizational problems, technical problems, political problems, environmental problems, and financial problems. This is not an exhaustive list. The important aspect of the problem statement, however, should be organizing the problem identification around the criteria the decision makers will use to choose an alternative policy.

D. *Policy Alternatives*

One of the questions raised by inexperienced policy analysts is this: How many alternatives do you provide decision makers? There is no agreed-upon "right" number among analysts. There are certain types of alternatives that are usually included for consideration, however. The first option that is important for consideration is the status quo. All policy analyses should include an examination of the consequences of doing nothing. The second common option is the incremental adjustment of current practice. If many decision criteria have been identified by the policymakers, alternatives that fit each criterion as well as combinations of criteria should be presented.

E. *Comparison of Alternatives*

Several formats for presenting and comparing policy alternatives were described in the previous chapters. This part of the policy report is effective when tables or charts are used to display the alternatives by the decision criteria. Text should support the visual presentations. Remember, a picture *is* worth a thousand words.

F. *Implementation Strategies*

Consideration of the fifth step of the CASA model is an important component of the policy report. Although the formal policy analysis is complete when the decision makers choose which option to implement, the process is really iterative and the process of implementation needs careful attention. The report should briefly detail issues in implementation that decision makers should use in determining the effectiveness of their choice.

G. *Evaluation*

This part of the report should discuss how to monitor the implementation of the policy choice. Potential structures of the

evaluation process as well as the focus of evaluation should be presented, with consequences of each process compared against the desired outcomes.

7.2 Oral Presentation of the Policy Analysis

After observing and listening to hundreds of oral presentations of reports, studies, and policy analyses, I offer two relevant points for consideration. First, spend time preparing for the oral presentation of your work. Policymakers are as likely to accept your recommendations based on your oral performance as they are after reading your policy analysis. In some cases, the content of your oral presentation is the only thing they remember. Second, remember the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Use tables, figures, and charts whenever possible to illustrate relationships and important concepts. Prepare an overhead of the visuals, so the audience can follow your presentation and so you can speak from each overhead.

Policymakers in education are busy people. As members of the board of education, they are volunteers who have many other commitments and tugs on their time. As a policy analyst, the quality of your performance will be judged on the product you present. In the oral presentation, do not spend time telling the policymakers how hard you worked or explaining in painstaking detail each step of the CASA model. Present your recommendations for policy alternatives clearly and let the policymakers ask questions.

In discussing the policy analysis, make the analysis simple and clear—just like the CASA model. *Simple* does not mean mindless but plain and uncomplicated. The discussion should be aimed at a well-informed *lay* audience. *Clear* means that all models or calculations should be easily explained, step by step, so the policymakers can understand how they work. When it makes sense in terms of the decision criteria, say it with numbers. How much absenteeism is there? By what kind of student? Compared with other schools, how do the numbers look? What critical data are missing but essential to understand fully the

extent of the problem? Questions like these typically are asked by policymakers. Anticipate them and be prepared.

Whatever the situation, do not attempt to "wing" it. If you have spent the time and effort in preparing a reasoned analysis, developing legitimate alternatives, and evaluating the merits of each alternative, then spend the time preparing for the oral presentation. Its importance cannot be underscored too much.

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NOTES

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